MA'ARIFUL QUR'AN

A Comprehensive commentary on the Holy Quran

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MA'ARIFUL-QUR'AN

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(Surah Al-Fatihah, Al-Baqarah)

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله وكفى، وسلام على عباده الذين اصطفى

FOREWORD

by

Justice Maulanā Muḥammad Taqi Usmāni

Ma'āriful-Qur'ān is the name of a detailed Urdu commentary of the Holy Qur'ān written by my father Maulanā Mufti Muḥammad Shafī' (رحمة الله عليه). He was one of the eminent scholars who served as a professor and as a grand Mufti of Darul-Uloom Deoband, the well-known university of the Islamic Sciences in the sub-continent of India. In 1943, he resigned from Darul-Uloom, due to his active involvement in the Pakistan movement, and when Pakistan came into existence, he migrated to Karachi where he devoted his life for this new homeland of the Muslims and served the country in different capacities. He also established Darul-Uloom Karachi, an outstanding institute of Islamic Sciences on the pattern of Darul-Uloom Deoband, which is regarded today as the biggest private institute of higher Islamic education in Pakistan.

He was a prolific writer who left behind him about one hundred books on different Islamic and literary subjects. Ma'āriful-Qur'ān was the last great work he accomplished four years before his demise.

The origin of Ma'āriful-Qur'ān refers back to the third of Shawwal 1373 A.H. (corresponding to the 2nd of July 1954) when the author was invited to give weekly lectures on the Radio Pakistan to explain selected verses of the Holy Qur'ān to the general audience. This invitation was accepted by the author on the condition that he would not accept any remuneration for this service and that his lectures would be broadcast without any interference by the editing authorities. The permanent title of this weekly programme was

"Ma'āriful-Qur'ān" (The Wisdom of the Holy Qur'ān) and it was broadcast every Friday morning on the network of Radio Pakistan.

This series of lectures continued for ten years upto the month of June 1964 whereby the new authorities stopped the programme for reasons best known to them. This series of lectures contained a detailed commentary on selected verses from the beginning of the Holy Qur'ān upto the Sūrah Ibrāhīm (Sūrah no. 14).

This weekly programme of Radio Pakistan was warmly welcomed by the Muslims throughout the globe and used to be listened to by thousands of Muslims, not only in Pakistan and India but also in Western and African countries.

After the programme was discontinued, there was a flood of requests from all over the world to transfer this series in a book-form and to complete the remaining part of the Holy Qur'an in the shape of a regular commentary.

These requests persuaded the esteemed author to revise these lectures and to add those verses which were not included in the original lectures. He started this project in 1383 A.H. (1964) and completed the commentary of Surah al-Fatihah in its revised form and started the revision of Surah al-Baqarah. However, due to his numerous involvements he had to discontinue this task, and it remained unattended during the next five years.

In Shawwal 1388 (1969) the esteemed author suffered from a number of diseases which made him restricted to his bed. It was during this ailment that he restarted this work while on bed and completed Sūrah al-Baqarah in the same condition. Since then he devoted himself to the "Ma'āriful-Qur'ān". Despite a large number of obstacles in his way, not only from the political atmosphere of the country and the difficult responsibilities he had on his shoulders in different capacities, but also from his health and physical condition, he never surrendered to any of them and continued his work with a miraculous speed until he accomplished the work in eight volumes (comprising of about seven thousand pages) within five years only.

After appearing in a regular book-form, Ma'āriful-Qur'ān was highly appreciated and widely admired by the Urdu-knowing Muslims throughout the world. Thousands of copies of the book are still circulated every year, and the demand for the book is so increasing

that it has always been a problem for its publisher to satisfy the demand to its optimum.

A Few Words about the present English Translation of Ma'āriful-Qur'ān

Let me say a few words about the present English translation of the Ma'āriful-Qur'ān.

Although a large number of English translations of the Holy Qur'ān is available in the market, yet no comprehensive commentary of the Holy Qur'ān has still appeared in the English language. Some brief footnotes found with some English translations cannot fulfil the need of a detailed commentary. Besides, they are generally written by the people who did not specialize themselves in the Qur'ānic sciences, and their explanatory notes do not often reflect the authentic interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān. Some such notes are based on an arbitrary interpretation having no foundation in the recognized principles of the exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān, and are thus misleading for a common reader.

On the other hand, during the last few decades, the Muslim population has increased among the English speaking countries in enormous numbers. These people and their new generations need a detailed commentary of the Holy Qur'ān which may explain to them the correct message of the last divine book with all the relevant material in an authentic manner which conforms to the recognized principles of *tafsīr* (the exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān).

Since Ma'āriful-Qur'ān was the latest book written on these lines and was proved to be beneficial for a layman as well as for a scholar, it was advised by different circles that its English translation may fulfill the need.

It made me look for a person who might undertake the task, not only with his professional competence, but also with his commitment to serve the Holy Qur'ān.

Fortunately, I succeeded in persuading Prof. Muḥammad Ḥasan Askarī, the well-known scholar of English literature and criticism, to undertake the translation. In the beginning he was reluctant due to his strong sense of responsibility in the religious matters, but when I assured him of my humble assistance throughout his endeavor, he not

only agreed to the proposal, but started the work with remarkable devotion. Despite my repeated requests, he did never accept any honorarium or a remuneration for his service. He was a chain-smoker. But he never smoked during his work on Ma'āriful-Qur'ān, which sometimes lasted for hours.

In this manner he completed the translation of about 400 pages of the original Urdu book and 156 verses of the Sūrah al-Baqarah, but unfortunately, his sudden demise discontinued this noble effort. Strangely enough, the last portion he translated was the commentary of the famous verse:

ولنبلونكم بشيئ من الخوف والجوع ونقص من الاموال والا نفس والثمرات
وبشرالصابرين 0 الذين اذا اصابتهم مصيبة قالوا انا لله وانا اليه راجعون 0

And surely, We will test you with a bit of fear and hunger and loss in wealth and lives and fruits. And give good tidings to the patient who, when they suffer a calamity, say, 'We certainly belong to Allah and to Him we are bound to return'.

Prof. Askari passed away in 1977, and due to my overwhelming occupations during the next 12 years, I could not find out a suitable person to substitute him. It was in 1989, that Prof. Muhammad Shamim offered his services to resume the translation from where Prof. Askari had left it. I found in him the same sincerity, commitment and devotion I had experienced in the late Professor. Moreover, he had decided to devote the rest of his life to the service of the Holy Qur'an without any financial benefit. Here again I tried my best to persuade him to accept some kind of honorarium, but it was in vain. He started his work from the Verse 158 of Surah al-Baqarah and has now completed the translation of the first two volumes of the original Ma'ariful-Qur'an and is working on the third volume.

Both Prof. Muḥammad Hasan Askari and Prof. Muḥammad Shamīm have insisted that their translations must be revised by me from the religious point of view. For this purpose, I have gone through the typescript of the translations of both of them and suggested some amendments where it was necessary.

The translation of Prof. Askari had been started at a time when the esteemed author of Ma'āriful-Qur'ān was still alive. We were fortunate to receive some guide-lines from the author himself. He had

advised the translators not to be too literal in translation to sacrifice the natural flow of the text. Moreover, he had emphasized that while rendering his book into English, the requirements of English readership must be kept in mind. Some discussions may be dispensed with. Similarly, many paragraphs may be condensed in the English version in order to avoid repetition.

The esteemed author had authorised me for suitable decisions in these matters. Both the learned translators, despite their earnest effort to reflect the original text as accurately as possible, have followed, in consultation with me, the said advices of the author himself. However they have never tried to sacrifice the original concept of the text for the beauty of language alone. Particularly, in the juristic discussions of the book, they have been very strict in the translation, lest some change in the style should creep in and distort the accurate connotation of the Islamic injunctions. In such places, the reader may feel some difficulty. However, a more concentrate reading can easily remove it.

Translation of the Holy Qur'ān

The original Urdu Ma'āriful-Qur'ān had not given a new translation of the Holy Qur'ān itself. Rather, the esteemed author had adopted the Urdu translations of Maulanā Maḥmoodūl-Ḥasan (Shaikhul-Hind) and Maulanā Ashraf Ali Thānavī on which he based his commentary. While rendering the book into English, we had three options about the translation of the Holy Qur'ān:

(a) To adopt any one of the already available English translations of the Holy Qur'ān, like those of Arberry, Pickthall or Abdullāh Yousuf Alī.

(b) To translate the Urdu translations used in the Ma'āriful-Qur'ān into English.

(c) To provide a new translation of our own.

After a great deal of consideration and consultation, we elected to work on the third option, i.e. to prepare a new translation of the Holy Qur'ān. The reasons behind this decision were manifold which need not be detailed here. In short, we wanted to prepare a translation which may be closer to the Qur'ānic text and easier to understand. For this purpose, we formed a committee with the following members:

1. Prof. Muḥammad Shameem.
2. Mr. Muḥammad Wali Raazi.
3. This humble writer.

This committee has accomplished the translation of the Holy Qur'ān upto the Sūrah Yūsuf and is still going on with this project.

The committee has all the famous available translations of the Holy text before it, and after a deep study of the relevant material found in the classical Arabic commentaries, lays down the new translation in as simple expressions as possible. While doing so, we have tried our best that the different possible interpretations of the Qur'anic text remain undisturbed, and the new translation accommodates as many of them as practicable. We have tried not to impose on our reader a particular interpretation where several interpretations were equally possible. However, where the translation could not accommodate more than one connotation, we have followed the one adopted by the majority of the classic commentators including Maulanā Ashraf Alī Thānavī on whose translation the Ma'āriful-Qur'ān is based.

Despite all these sincere efforts, one cannot avoid the admission that the exact translation of the Holy Qur'ān is impossible. One cannot convey the glory and the beauty of the divine expression in any other language, let alone the English language which, despite its vast vocabulary, seems to be miserable when it comes to the expression of spiritual concepts. Therefore, even after observing all the precautions at our command, we feel that we were trying to translate a text which is - as Arberry has rightly put it - totally untranslatable.

However, this is another humble effort to convey the basic message of the Holy Qur'ān to a common reader in a simple manner. How far we have succeeded in this effort? Allah knows best.

The Scheme of the Translation

Now, here are some points to be kept in mind while consulting the translation.

1. Although the translators have tried their best to preserve not only the literal sense of the Holy text, but also the order of words and sentences, yet, while translating the idiomatic expressions, it is

sometimes felt that the literal translation may distort the actual sense or reduce the emphasis embodied in the Arabic text. At such places effort has been made to render the Quranic sense into a closer English expression.

2. Both in the translation of the Holy Qur'ān and in the commentary, a uniform scheme of transliteration has been adopted. The scheme is summarized in the beginning pages of the book.

3. The names of the prophets have been transliterated according to their Arabic pronunciation, and not according to their biblical form. For example, the biblical Moses has been transliterated as Mūsā علیہ السلام, which is the correct Arabic pronunciation. Similarly, instead of biblical Abraham, the Qur'ānic Ibrāhīm علیہ السلام and instead of Joseph, the Qur'ānic Yūsuf علیہ السلام has been preferred.

However, in the names other than those of prophets, like Pharaoh, their English form has been retained.

4. A permanent feature of the original Urdu Ma'ariful-Qur'an is its "*Khulasa-e-Tafseer*" (Summary). Under every group of verses, the esteemed author has given a brief summary of the meaning of the verses to help understand them in one glimpse. This summary was taken from Bayān-ul-Qur'ān, the famous commentary of Maulanā Ashraf Alī Thānavī رحمۃ اللہ علیہ. He has set up this summary by adding some explanatory words or sentences within brackets to his Urdu translation. The esteemed author of Ma'āriful-Qur'ān has reproduced this summary (after simplification in some places) with the heading of-Khulasa-e-Tafsīr خلاصہ تفسیر before his own commentary to the relevant group of verses.

While translating Ma'ariful-Qur'an into English, it was very difficult, rather almost impossible, to give that summary in the same fashion. Therefore, the translators have restricted themselves to the commentary of Ma'āriful-Qur'ān and have not translated the Khulasa-e-Tafsir خلاصہ تفسیر. However, where they found some additional points in the summary which are not expressly mentioned in the commentary, they have merged those points into the main commentary, so that the English reader may not be deprived of them.

It is only by the grace of Allah Almighty that in this way we could be able to present this first volume of this huge work. The second

volume is already under composing, and we hope that Allah سبحانه و تعالى will give us *tawfiq* to bring the next volumes as soon as possible.

Acknowledgments are due to all those who contributed their efforts, advices and financial support to this work. Those deserving special reference are Prof. Abdul-Wahid Siddiqi, Dr. Zafar Ishaq Ansari, Mr. Abubakr Varachia and Mr. Shu'aib 'Umar (both of South Africa) Dr. Muhammad Ismail (of U.S.A), and Mr. Altaf Barkhurdaria.

My elder brother Mr. Muhammad Wali Raazi has been associated with the work right from its beginning, and has always been a great source of guidance, support and encouragement. He is a member of the committee set up for the translation of the Holy Qur'ān and his remarkable contribution, not only to the translation of the Holy Qur'ān, but also to the translation of the commentary is unforgettable. He, too, has been contributing his valuable time and effort to this project for years just for the sake of Allah. May Allah approve his contributions with His pleasure and bless him with the best of rewards both here and hereinafter.

As for Prof. Muhammad Shameem, the original translator of Ma'āriful-Qur'ān after the demise of Prof. Muhammad Hasan 'Askari, all the formal words of acknowledgment seem to be miserably deficient for the valuable service he has rendered to this project. He has not only translated the book with precaution and love, but also devoted his whole life to the Holy Qur'ān and spared no effort to bring this volume into light. Out of his commitment to the cause, he did not restrict himself to the work of a translator, but also undertook the function of an editor and a proof reader and supervised all other minute details of the publishing process. His devotion, sincerity and hardwork is beyond any amount of admiration. May Allah grant him the best reward of His absolute approval for his noble work. *Amin.*

With these few words I am honoured to present this first volume to the readers. May Allah approve this effort and make it beneficial to the *Ummah. 'Amin.*

Muhammad Taqi Usmāni
Darul-Uloom, Karachi-14
10 Safar 1416
9 July 1995

TRANSLITERATION SCHEME

Arabic Letter	Name of Letter	English Transliteration
ا	الف -- **Alif**	**a**
ب	باء -- **bā**	**b**
ت	تاء -- **tā**	**t**
ث	ثاء -- **thā**	**th**
ج	جيم -- **jīm**	**j**
ح	حاء -- **hā**	**h**
خ	خاء -- **khā**	**kh**
د	دال -- **dāl**	**d**
ذ	ذال -- **dhāl**	**dh**
ر	راء -- **rā**	**r**
ز	زاى -- **zā**	**z**
س	سين -- **sīn**	**s**
ش	شين -- **shīn**	**sh**
ص	صاد -- **sād**	**ṣ**
ض	ضاد -- **dād**	**ḍ**
ط	طاء -- **tā**	**ṭ**
ظ	ظاء -- **zā**	**ẓ**
ع	عين -- **'ayn**	**'**
غ	غين -- **ghayn**	**gh**
ف	فاء -- **fā**	**f**
ق	قاف -- **qāf**	**q**
ك	كاف -- **kāf**	**k**
ل	لام -- **lām**	**l**
م	ميم -- **mīm**	**m**
ن	نون -- **nūn**	**n**
ه	هاء -- **hā**	**h**
و	واؤ -- **wāw**	**w**
ء	همزه -- **Hamzah**	**'**
ى .	ياء -- **yā**	**y**

Short Vowels

ـَـ	: Fatḥah	a
ـِـ	: Kasrah	i
ـُـ	: Ḍammah	u

Long Vowels

ا	: Shortened Alif	ā
آ	: Maddah Alif	ā
ى	: Maddah Yā	ī
	: Maddah Wāw	ū

Dipthongs

اى	:Alif and Yā	ay
او اؤ	: Alif and Wāw	aw (also au in some cases)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمدلله وكفى وسلام على عباده الذين اصطفى

PREFACE

This is an introduction comprising of some basic informations about the Holy Qur'ān its revelation, the history of its descention and preservation and similar other subjects. This introduction was written by me on the direction of my father, the esteemed author of Ma'āriful-Qur'ān. He wanted to write this introduction himself, but due his many other involvements and his deteriorating health, he could not do so. At this stage he directed me to write on these subject. When I started writing the introduction, it became a lengthy volume itself and it was not proper to include it in the Ma'āriful-Qur'ān as an introduction. Therefore, the book was published separately under the title of "Uloom-ul-Qur'ān" and I condensed its discussions to the present introduction, which was published in the beginning of the second edition of 'Ma'āriful-Qur'ān'.

This introduction is translated into English by Prof. Muhammad Shameem after he accomplished the translation of the first volume of Ma'āriful-Qur'ān. My book "Uloom-ul-Qur'ān" is now available in English also. Those who like detailed discussions on these subjects may refer to it.

Muḥammad Taqi Usmāni
11 Safar 1416 A.H.

بسم اللّٰہ الرحمن الرحیم

الحمدللّٰہ وکفی وسلام علی عبادہ الذین اصطفی

Waḥy and its true nature

Since the Holy Qur'ān was revealed to our beloved prophet Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم by means of *Waḥy* (revelation), an understanding of some particulars about *Waḥy* is imperative at the very outset.

The need for *Waḥy*

Every Muslim knows that Allah Almighty has sent man into this world as a matter of test, and in return for his being obligated with certain duties, the whole universe has been placed at his service. For this reason man, once he is in the world, must do two things:

1. He should make the best use of this world, and of things created in it.
2. While using this world to his advantage, he should keep the injunctions of Allah Almighty in sight and do nothing that goes against His will and pleasure.

For these two functions man needs knowledge. Therefore, unless he knows the reality of this world, the properties of different things and the manner in which they can be put to use, he cannot use anything in this world to his advantage. Likewise, unless and until he knows the will of Allah Almighty as to what pleases Him and what displeases Him, it will be impossible for him to lead a life in line with the will of Allah Almighty.

So Allah Almighty, along with the creation of man, has created three things through which he could continue receiving knowledge of the above-mentioned matters of concern. These are:

1. Man's senses, that is, the eyes, the ears, the nose, the mouth, the hands and the feet.
2. The reason.
3. The *Wahy*.

Consequently, man finds out many things through his senses, many others through reason, and the knowledge of things he cannot get through these two sources are bestowed upon him through *Wahy*.

The arrangement between these three sources of knowledge is such that each one has its limits, and a particular sphere of activity beyond which it does not work. In natural sequence, the knowledge of things man collects through his senses cannot be deduced through bland reason. For instance, you know by seeing a wall with your eyes that its colour is white. But, should you close your eyes and try to find out the colour of that wall on the sole strength of your reason, this will then be impossible. Similarly, the knowledge of things that comes through reason cannot be discovered by senses alone. For instance, you cannot find out as to who made that wall by simply seeing it with your eyes or touching it with your hands. Not at all, you rather need reason to arrive at that conclusion.

In short, reason gives no guidance as far as the five senses work efficiently, and when the five senses become helpless, reason starts functioning. But, even the guidance given by this reason is not unlimited. This too stops at a certain limit. Then there are things the knowledge of which can neither be acquired through senses nor through reason. For instance, to find out about this very wall, as to what manner of its use will please Allah Almighty and what manner of its use will displease Him, is possible neither through senses nor through reason. In order to give man the answer to such questions, the source that Allah Almighty has prescribed is what is known as *Wahy*. And the method it follows is that Allah Almighty selects one of His servants, ordains him as His messenger and to him He reveals His Word. This Word is *Wahy*.

This makes it clear that *Wahy* is the highest source of knowledge for man which offers to him the answer to questions about his life which cannot be solved by means of reason and senses, but, he still

has to have that knowledge. This further explains that reason and perception alone are not enough to show man the way. It is rather all the more necessary, almost inevitable, that the Divine *Wahy* be there for his guidance. Since *Wahy* is basically needed where reason does not work, it is, therefore, not necessary that everything communicated through *Wahy* be compulsively comprehended through reason. On the contrary, as reason is no help in finding out the colour of some object since that is the job of the senses, so is the knowledge of many religious beliefs, the gracious giving of which is the sole prerogative of *Wahy* and not of reason. Furthermore, trusting reason alone for their comprehension is not sound and correct.

To begin with, it is totally senseless to discuss the issue of *Wahy* with a person who, God forbid, does not accept the very existence of God. But, for a person who believes in the existence of Allah Almighty and has faith in His perfect power, it is not at all difficult to understand that *Wahy* is a rational need, that it is possible and that it is there for real. If you have faith in the fact that this universe has been created by an absolutely powerful entity, He is the One who has sent man down here to accomplish some particular mission, how then is it possible to imagine that He, after once having created man, would leave him off in total darkness, without ever telling him why did he come into this world, what his duties were, where was he destined to go and how could he realize the purpose of his life? How could a person, whose sanity is still there, send one of his servants on a certain trip under a designated mission without ever telling him the purpose of the trip while he is leaving, nor explaining it to him later on through some message as to why he has been sent out there and what duties he is supposed to carry out during the trip? When a man of ordinary reason cannot do something like this, how can something like this be imagined with respect to the most Holy Lord of the Universe under Whose ultimate wisdom this whole system of the universe is functioning? After all, how is it possible that the Being, that did create such a mind-boggling system composed of the moon, the sun, the sky, the earth, the stars and the planets, would remain unable to institute some arrangement of communication with His servants, through which human beings could be given guidance about the purpose of their lives? If there is *'Īmān* or faith in the ultimate wisdom of Allah

Almighty, then admitting that He did not forsake His servants in the dark, will become all the more necessary; rather on the contrary, He has surely instituted some regular system for their guidance. And so, this very regular system of guidance is known as *Waḥy* (Revelation) and *Risālah* (Prophethood).

This makes it crystal clear that *Waḥy* is not only a religious belief but also a rational need the rejection of which amounts to a rejection of the ultimate wisdom of Allah Almighty.

The Modes of Descent

This sacred sequence of *Waḥy* (revelation) and *Risālah* (prophethood) came to an end with the last of the prophets, Muḥammad al-Mustafā صلى الله عليه وسلم. Nevermore, shall *Waḥy* descend upon any man, nor there is need for it. *Waḥy* used to come to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in several forms and modes. In a *ḥadīth* from Sahīh al-Bukhārī, Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضى الله عنها says that Sayyidnā Hārith ibn Hishām رضى الله عنه once asked the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم as to how did *Wahy* come to him. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said that 'there are times when I hear something like the chiming of bells and this mode of *Waḥy* is the hardest on me. After that, when this chime-sequence ends, that which has been said by the sound seems to have been committed to my memory. And there are times when the angel appears before me in the shape of a man.' (Sahīh al-Bukhārī, 2/1)

As regards the likening of the sound of *Waḥy* to the sound of bells in the *ḥadīth* cited above, Shaykh Muhyy al-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī has explained it by saying that, in the first place, the sound of *Waḥy* is continuous like the sound of a bell which does not break off in between; and in the second place, when the bell rings continuously, it generally becomes difficult for the listener to determine the direction of its sound because its sound seems to be coming from all directions. And the Divine Word too carries with it the distinction that it has no one single direction, in fact, the sound gives the impression of being heard from all directions. A correct realization of this phenomenon is just not possible without auditory experience, however, in order to bring this happening closer to common comprehension, the Holy Prophet ﷺ has simply likened it to the sound of bells. (Fayd al-Bari, 19,20/1)

With the descent of *Waḥy* in this mode, the Holy Prophet ﷺ came under very heavy strain. Sayyidah 'A'ishah رضی اللہ عنہا says towards the end of this very *hadīth* that she had seen the coming of *Waḥy* to him during days of extreme winter. When the progression of *Waḥy* ceased, his blessed forehead would have already become dripping-wet inspite of the chilly weather. In yet another narration, Sayyidah 'A'ishah رضی اللہ عنہا relates: When *Waḥy* came to him, his breath would seem to stop, the radiant face would change -- turning pale like the branch of a date palm, the front teeth would shiver from cold and he would perspire so much that its drops would roll like pearls. (Al-Itqan, 1/46)

On occasions, so much intensity would be generated in this state of *Waḥy* that the animal he would be riding at that time would sit down, wilting under his weight. Once, when he was resting his blessed head on the lap of Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضی اللہ عنہ there started the descent of *Waḥy* in that very posture. This released so much weight on Sayyidnā Zayd's thigh that it seemed to break. (Zad al-Ma'ad, 1/18,19)

There were times when a low-volumed sound of this *Waḥy* was sensed by others as well. Sayyidnā 'Umar رضی اللہ عنہ says: When *Waḥy* came to him, a sound somewhat similar to the buzzing of honey-bees could be heard close to his most bright face. (Tabwib Musnad Ahmad, Kitab al-Sirah al-Nabaviyah, 20/212)

Under the second mode of *Waḥy*, an angel would come to him in some human form and deliver Allah's message. Generally, on such occasions, Sayyidnā Jibrā'īl علیہ السلام used to come to him in the form of Sayyidnā Dihyah al-Kalbi رضی اللہ عنہ . Certainly, at other times, he has come in other forms as well. In any case, this mode of the coming of *Waḥy* when it was brought by Sayyidnā Jibrā'īl علیہ السلام appearing in human form, was the easiest on the Holy Prophet ﷺ . (Al-Itqan, 1/46)

The third mode of the coming of *Waḥy* used to be that Sayyidnā Jibrā'īl علیہ السلام would appear as he was, without having taken on the shape of a man. But this has happened only thrice in his entire life-time. First of all, it was when the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم had himself wished to see him in his real form and shape. The second time, it was in the Mi'rāj (the Ascent to Heaven), and the third time it was at Ajyād in Makkah al-Mukarramah during the very early days of

prophethood. The first two happenings stand proved authentically, however, the last one suffers from weak chains of authority and is, therefore, doubtful. (Fath al-Bari. 1/18,19)

The fourth mode is distinguished by a direct, non-intermediary, two-way conversation with Allah Almighty. This honour was bestowed upon the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم only once, that is, in Mi'rāj, while awake. In addition to that, once it was in a dream as well that he was in a conversing situation with Allah Almighty.

Under the fifth mode of *Waḥy*, it so happened that Sayyidnā Jibrā'il علیه السلام would, without appearing physically in any form whatsoever, let some words of the message fall into his heart. This is technically known as نفث فی الروع (*nafth fī al-rau'*: blowing into the heart) (Ibid).

The Chronology of the Revelation of the Qur'ān

The noble Qur'ān is, in fact, the Divine Word. It is, therefore, secure in the Preserved Tablet. The noble Qur'ān says: بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَّجِيدٌ فِي لَوْحٍ مَّحْفُوظٍ (Rather, it is the glorious Qur'an in the Preserved Tablet). (85:21-22)

Then, from the Preserved Tablet, its descention took place twice. Once, the whole of it had been sent to *al-Bayt al-'Izzah*, the most exalted House on the firmament of the world. The most exalted House (also known as *al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr*) is a House facing Ka'bah that exists in the firmament as the place of worship for angels. This descention took place on the Night of *Qadr* (rendered as the Night of Power in English). The second time it used to be revealed to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم gradually as needed, having reached its completion in twenty three years. These two modalities of the Qur'anic revelations become clear through the style of the noble Qur'ān itself. In addition to that, al-Nasā'i, al-Baihaqī and al-Hākim and others have reported from Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās رضی الله عنه what can be summed up by saying that the first descention of the noble Qur'ān to the firmament of the world took place all at one time and the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was blessed with the second descention gradually. (al-Itqan, v. 1, p. 41)

Explaining the wisdom behind the first descention of the noble

Qur'ān on the firmament facing the world, Imam Abu Shamah has said that it aimed at demonstrating the exalted majesty of the noble Qur'ān, and at the same time, it was to tell the angels that this was the last Book of Allah which is ready for descention for the guidance of the people of the earth.

Shaykh al-Zurqāni makes yet another point when he says that this two-timed descention also aimed at stressing that this Book is beyond all doubts, and it stands preserved at two more places other than the blessed heart of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم , that is, in the Preserved Tablet, and in the Exalted House. (Manahil al-'Irfan, v.1, p. 39).

It is almost agreed by all the scholars that the second gradual descention which was on the heart of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم began when his age was forty years. The beginning of this descention, as authentically reported, was in the Night of *Qadr*, and this was the date on which, some years later, the event of the Battle of Badr came to pass. However, nothing definite can be said about the exact date of Ramaḍān when this Night fell. There are some reports which identify that of the seventeenth Rāmaḍan, while others place it on the nineteenth, and still others which indicate the Night of the twenty-seventh. (Tafsir Ibn Jarir v. 10, p. 7)

The verses that came first

It is authentically said that the first verses to come to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم were the verses from which Sūrah al-'Alaq begins. As in Sahīh al-Bukhāri, Sayyidah 'A'ishah رضى الله عنها while relating its background has said that the very first beginning of revelations to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم actually was through true dreams. Following that, came his zeal to worship in seclusion. During this period, he would spend night after night in the Cave of Ḥira' and stay in the state of *I'tikāf* devoted to his *'ibādah* (worship) when one day, right there in that cave, there came an angel from Allah Almighty and the very first thing he said was إِقْرَأْ (*Iqra'*: 'Read'). The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: مَا أَنَا بِقَارِئٍ :' I am unable to read.' After that, relating the event himself, he said that 'the angel, hearing this answer of mine, caught hold of me and embraced me with such force that I had to go through unbearable strain.' Then he released me and said: إِقْرَأْ :'Read'. I said: 'I am unable to read.' Thereupon, he seized me the third time,

gave a hard embrace and then released me. After that he said:

اِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِيْ خَلَقَ ۝ خَلَقَ الْاِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ۝ اِقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْاَكْرَمُ
الَّذِيْ عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ۝ عَلَّمَ الْاِنْسَانَ مَالَمْ يَعْلَمْ ۝

Recite with the Name of your Lord who created, created Man out of a blood-clot. Recite and Your Lord is Most Generous who taught by the Pen, taught Man what he did not know. (96:1-3)

These were the first verses to be revealed to him. Thereafter, the coming of *Waḥy* stayed discontinued for three years. This period is known as the period of *fatrah*, that is, the period when *Waḥy* was discontinued for a short interval of time. Then, it was after three years that the same angel who had visited him in the Cave of Hirā' became visible to him between the heaven and the earth. He read to him the verses of Sūrah al-Muddaththir. Thereafter, the sequence of *Waḥy* was reactivated.

The Makki and Madani Verses

While looking at the titles of the Surahs of the Holy Qur'ān, you may have noticed the entry, *Makkī* (or Meccan, Makkan, *Makkīyyah*) with some Surāhs, and *Madanī* (Medinan, Medinite, *Madanīyyah*) with some others. It is necessary to understand correctly what it means. In the terminology of the commentators, the '*Makkī 'āyah*' means a verse that was revealed to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم earlier than he actually reached Madīnah by way of *hijrah* (emigration). Similarly, the '*Madanī 'āyah*' or the *Madanī* verse means that it was revealed after he migrated to Madinah. Some people take '*Makkī*' to mean that the verse concerned was revealed in the city of Makkah, and so the '*Madanī*' is supposed to have been revealed in Madīnah. This view is not correct because there are several verses which were not revealed in the city of Makkah, yet are called *Makkī* because they had already been revealed before *hijrah*. As such, the verses that were revealed in Minā, 'Arāfat, or during the Journey of Ascent (*Mi'rāj*) are also called *Makkī*. So much so, that the verses revealed during the journey of *hijrah* enroute Madīnah are also called *Makkī*. Similarly, there are several verses which were not revealed in the city of Madīnah, but they are *Madanī*. For example, there were several journeys that the Holy Prophet ﷺ had to undertake while

going many hundred miles away from Madīnah, and the verses revealed at all those places are called *Madanī* anyway. So much so that the particular verses that were revealed on the occasion of the Conquest of Makkah or the military campaign of Hudaybiyyah in the city of Makkah proper or its environs are also called *Madanī*. Accordingly, the Qur'ānic verse:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا

Surely, Allah commands you to fulfil trust obligations towards those entitled to them. (4:58)

is *Madanī* although it was revealed in Makkah al-Mukarramah. (al-Burhan, v. 1, p. 88, and Manahil al-'Irfan, v. 1, p. 88)

Then there are Sūrahs which are either totally *Makkī*, or totally *Madanī*. For instance, Sūrah al-Muddaththir is wholly *Makkī* and Sūrah 'Al-'Imran is wholly *Madanī*. But, on occasions, it has so happened that one or some *Madani* verses find a place in the Sūrah which is wholly *Makkī*. On other occasions, it has happened just the reverse. For instance, Sūrah al-A'raf is *Makkī*, but in it the verses from وَاسْأَلْهُمْ عَنِ الْقَرْيَةِ الَّتِي كَانَتْ حَاضِرَةَ الْبَحْرِ to وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ are *Madanī*. Similarly, Sūrah al-Ḥajj is Madanī but four of its verses, that is, those from وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ وَلَا نَبِيٍّ إِلَّا إِذَا تَمَنَّىٰ to عَذَابُ يَوْمٍ عَقِيمٍ are *Makkī*.

This also makes it clear that the incidence of a Sūrah being *Makkī* or *Madanī* is generally conditioned by the nature of the majority of its verses and so it happened frequently that the initial verses of a Sūrah which were revealed before *Hijrah* were regarded as *Makkī*, although some of its verses may have been revealed later on following *Hijrah*. (Manahil al-'Irfan, v. 1, p. 192)

Characteristics of *Makkī* and *Madanī* Verses

The scholars of *Tafsir*, after having made a thorough investigation into the *Makkī* and *Madanī* Surahs, have come up with a set of characteristics that tell right off if a Sūrah is *Makkī* or *Madanī*. Some of these characteristics are recognized as universal rules while others hold good most of the time. The universal rules are as follows:

1. Every Sūrah in which the word كَلَّا (never) appears is *Makkī*. This word has been used 33 times in 15 Sūrahs, and all these verses are in the last half of the noble Qur'ān.

2. Every Sūrah in which (according to the Hanafiyyah) there appears a verse of *Sajdah* is *Makkī*.
3. Every Sūrah, with the exception of Sūrah al-Baqarah, in which the story of Ādam and Iblīs finds mention is *Makkī*.
4. Every Sūrah in which a permission of *jihād* or a description of its injunctions has been given is *Madanī*.
5. Every verse which mentions the hypocrites is *Madanī*.

The following characteristics are general and mostly frequent, that is, sometimes the contrary may happen, but usually and mostly it follows the said pattern:

1. In *Makkī* Sūrahs, generally, the form of address used is يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ (O people), and in *Madanī* Surahs it is يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ آمَنُوْا (O believers).
2. The *Makkī 'Ayat* (Verses) and Sūrahs are generally short and brief while the *Madanī* verses and chapters are long and detailed.
3. The *Makkī* Sūrahs mostly consist of subjects such as, Oneness of Allah, Prophethood, affirmation of the Hereafter, the panorama of the Resurrection, words of comfort for the Holy Prophet ﷺ and events relating to the past communities, and in these, the number of injunctions and laws taken up is much less as compared with the *Madanī* Surahs where family and social laws, injunctions of *jihād* and expositions of limits and duties appear frequently.
4. In *Makkī* Sūrahs, most of the confrontation is against idolaters while in *Madanī* Sūrahs it is against the people of the Book and the hypocrites.
5. The style of *Makkī* Sūrahs is more majestic. It has profusion of metaphors, similies and allegories, and the vocabulary used is extensive. Contrary to this, the style of the *Madani* Sūrahs is comparatively simple.

This difference in the style of *Makkī* and *Madanī* Surahs initially owes its origin to a variety of conditions, circumstances and addressees. Muslims had to deal mostly with the idolaters of Arabia during their Makkan life. No Islamic state was born yet. Therefore,

during this period, more emphasis was laid on the correction of beliefs, reform of morals, logical refutation of the idolaters and the miraculous nature of the noble Qur'ān. Contrary to this, an Islamic state had risen in the Holy city of Madinah. People were rushing into the fold of Islam, group after group. Idolatery stood refuted intellectually. The ideological confrontation was now wholly against the people of the Book. Therefore, greater attention was paid to education in injunctions, laws, limits and duties, and on the refutation of the people of the Book. The style adopted matched these objectives.

The Gradual Revelation of the Noble Qur'ān

As said earlier, the noble Qur'ān was not revealed to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم suddenly and simultaneously. On the contrary, it was revealed, little by little, over a span of nearly twenty three years. At times, Jibrā'īl عليه السلام would come with a small verse, or even with some unit of a verse. Then, there were times when several verses would be revealed at one time. The smallest portion of the Qur'ān which was revealed as such is غَيْرُ أُولِي الضَّرَرِ (al-Nisā': 4:94) which forms part of a long verse. On the other hand, the whole of Sūrah al-An'am was revealed at one time. (Ibn Kathir, v. 2, p. 122)

Rather than being revealed all at once, why was the Qur'ān revealed little by little? The polytheists of Arabia had themselves put this question to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم . Allah Almighty has taken it upon Himself to answer the question in the following words:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْ لَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الْقُرْآنُ جُمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ ۖ وَرَتَّلْنَاهُ تَرْتِيلًا ﴿٣٢﴾ وَلَا يَأْتُونَكَ بِمَثَلٍ إِلَّا جِئْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَأَحْسَنَ تَفْسِيرًا ﴿٣٣﴾

The disbelievers said, "Why has the Qur'ān not been sent down upon him all at once?" "(We did) like this, so that We may strengthen your heart thereby, and We have recited it very distinctly. They bring not to thee any similitude but that We bring thee the truth, and better in exposition" (25:32-33)

It is sufficient to understand a gist of the wisdom behind the gradual revelation of the Holy Qur'ān as stated by Imam al-Rāzī in his explanation of this verse. He says:

1. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was *ummiyy*, that is, being unlettered, he did not read or write. So, had the entire Qur'ān been

revealed at one time, it would have been difficult to remember and document. Contrary to this, Sayyidnā Musā علیہ السلام knew reading and writing, therefore, the Torah was revealed to him at one single time.

2. If the entire Qur'ān had been revealed all at once, immediate compliance of all its injunctions would have become obligatory, and this would have gone against the wise graduation which has featured as a matter of concern in the Sharī'ah of our Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم

3. The Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم had to go through ever-new tortures inflicted by his people. That Jibrā'īl علیہ السلام came, again and again, with the words of the noble Qur'an, made his stand against these tortures bearable, and gave strength to his heart.

4. A large portion of the Qur'ān is devoted to answers given to people who posed questions, while some other portion refers to various particular events. Therefore, the revelation of those verses was appropriate at the time when those questions were asked, or those events came to pass. This increased the insight of Muslims and when the Qur'ān unfolded that which was unseen, its truth became all the more manifest. (al-Tafsir al-Kabir, v. 6, p. 336)

***Sabab al-nuzul*: (Cause of revelation)**

The verses of the noble Qur'ān are of two kinds. In the first place, there are the verses that Allah Almighty revealed on His own. Their revelation was not caused by some particular event or a question asked by someone. In the second place, there are those verses which were revealed in answer to some question or with reference to some event. This could be termed as the background of these verses. This background is known, in the terminology of the commentators, as the '*sabab*' of *nuzūl* ('cause' of revelation) or the '*shā'n*' of *nuzūl* (the 'background' of revelation). For instance, take the verse in Sūrah al-Baqarah:

لَا تَنْكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكٰتِ حَتّٰى يُؤْمِنَّ وَلَاَمَةٌ مُّؤْمِنَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ مُّشْرِكَةٍ وَّلَوْ اَعْجَبَتْكُمْ

Do not marry female associators unless they come to believe, and a Muslim slave girl is better than a female associator, even though she is liked by you. (2:221)

This verse was revealed in the wake of a particular event. During

the days of Ignorance, Sayyidnā Marthad ibn Abī Marthad al-Ghanavī رضی اللہ عنہ had a relationship with a woman, named 'Anaq. After embracing Islam, he migrated to Madīnah while that woman stayed behind in Makkah al-Mukarramah. There was an occasion when Sayyidnā Marthad visited Makkah al-Mukarramah on a certain business. 'Anaq came to him with an invitation to sin. Sayyidnā Marthad refused flatly and said: 'Now Islam has come between me and you, but should you so wish, I can marry you after clearing it with the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم.' After returning to Madīnah, Sayyidnā Marthad sought his permission to marry the woman he said he liked. Thereupon, this verse was revealed, and it prohibited marriage with *mushrik* women. (Asbab al-Nuzul by al-Wahidi, p. 38)

This event is the '*shā'n*' or '*sabab*' of *nuzūl* ('cause' or 'background' of revelation) behind the verse mentioned above. The background of revelation is, therefore, very important in the exegesis of the noble Qur'ān. There are many verses the meaning of which cannot be correctly understood unless the circumstances underlying their revelation become known.

The Seven Readings of the Holy Qur'ān

In order that the noble Qur'an becomes easily recitable, Allah Almighty has blessed the Muslim community with special convenience by allowing it to read the words of the Qur'ān in more than one way. If there are situations when a person is unable to pronounce some words in one manner, he could recite it in another. It appears in a *ḥadīth* of Sahīh Muslim that the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم was once sitting by the pond of Banu Ghifar while Angel Jibrā'īl came and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to ask your community to recite the Qur'ān following one method of reading.' He said: 'I seek from Allah His pardon and forgiveness. My people do not have the ability to do so.' Then, Angel Jibrā'īl returned to him and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to let your people recite the Qur'ān following two readings.' He said: 'I seek pardon and forgiveness from Allah Almighty. My people do not have the ability to do even that.' Then, Jibrā'īl came the third time and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to let your people recite the Qur'ān following three readings.' Again he said: 'I seek pardon and forgiveness from Allah Almighty. My

people do not have the ability to do even that.' Then he came the fourth time and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to let your people recite the Qur'ān following seven readings. So, whichever of these they follow to read the Qur'ān, their recitation will be correct.'
(Manahil al-'Irfan, v. 1, p. 33)

Accordingly, there is yet another *ḥadīth* where the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said:

إِنَّ هٰذَا الْقُرْاٰنَ اُنْزِلَ عَلٰى سَبْعَةِ أَحْرُفٍ فَاقْرَءُ وْا مَاتَيَسَّرَ مِنْهُ

This Qur'an has been revealed covering seven versions. So from out of these, recite in a way that is easy on you.

What is meant by 'Seven Versions' in this saying of the Holy Prophet ﷺ ? There are several scholarly positions in this connection but according to scholars who have conducted painstaking and exhaustive research on the subject, the weightier meaning of this expression is that the variations found in different readings of the Holy Qur'ān are of seven types. These are as follows:

1. The difference in nouns: This includes the difference concerning singular, dual, plural, as well as, masculine and feminine. For instance, in one reading it is تَمَّتْ كَلِمَةُ رَبِّكَ, while in another, تَمَّتْ كَلِمَاتُ رَبِّكَ.

2. The difference in verbs: That there be past in one reading, the present in another and the imperative in yet another. For instance, it is رَبَّنَا بَاعِدْ بَيْنَ أَسْفَارِنَا in one reading, while رَبَّنَا بَعَّدَ بَيْنَ أَسْفَارِنَا in another.

3. The difference in the placement of diacritical marks: That which shows variance in *I'rāb*, which reflects variance in grammatical mode of a word and is demonstrated through desinential inflections, such as *kasrah*, *fatḥah*, *ḍammah*. For instance, reading لَايُضَارَّ كَاتِبٌ as لَا يُضَارَّ كَاتِبٌ and ذُوالْعَرْشِ الْمَجِيْدُ as ذُوالْعَرْشِ الْمَجِيْدِ.

4. The difference caused by addition and deletion of words: That there be some word missing in one reading while it has been added on in another; for instance, the words تَجْرِى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْاَنْهٰرُ appear in one reading while the words تَجْرِىْ تَحْتَهَا الْاَنْهٰرُ appear in another.

5. The difference of precedence and succession: That there is a word which precedes in one reading, while it succeeds in the other.

For instance وَجَاءَتْ سَكْرَةُ الْحَقِّ بِالْمَوْتِ and وَجَاءَتْ سَكْرَةُ الْمَوْتِ بِالْحَقِّ .

6. The difference caused by transposition: This happens when a word found in one reading is replaced by another word in another reading. For instance, نُنْشِزُهَا and نَنْشُرُهَا, also فَتَبَيَّنُوْا and فَتَثَبَّتُوْا, and طَلْحٍ and طلح .

7. The difference caused by manners of reading: It includes variations in *tafkhīm* (velarization, making sound heavy), *tarqīq* (making a letter sound soft), *imālah* (inclination, bending the sound of a short vowel), *madd* (prolongation), *qasr* (to shorten), *hamz*: *hamza*tation (providing a letter with *hamzah*), *iẓhār* (clear pronunciation) and *idghām* (assimilation). It means that, by doing these, the actual word does not change but the mode of its pronunciation does change. For instance, the word, مُوْسٰى is rendered as مُوْسَىْ in one of the readings.

Anyhow, many readings were revealed incorporating these seven types of different renderings. This difference between them really made no difference in meaning. The latitude so given was aimed at making recitation easy.

In the beginning, people were not totally used to the style of the Qur'ān, therefore, many readings were permitted within the radius of these seven types. But, it was the blessed practice of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that he would go through the entire revealed Qur'ān with Jibrā'īl عليه السلام during the month of Ramaḍān every year. The year he left this mortal world, that was the year he did so twice. This '*daur*' or meticulous re-reading of the Qur'ān is called العرضة الأخيرة (last review). On this occasion, many readings were abrogated. Only readings retained were the ones which continue to stay preserved to this day with uninterrupted succession.

Sayyidnā 'Uthman رضى الله عنه , during the period of his *khilafah*, arranged to have seven copies of the noble Qur'ān prepared in order to remove misgivings regarding the recitation of Qur'ān. He incorporated all readings in these seven copies by leaving the calligraphed verses of the noble Qur'ān without dots and desinences (the vowel-points) so that the text could be read in accordance with whichever reading one wished to follow from among the very readings cited. Thus most of the

readings merged into this script, and the readings that could not merge into the script were saved by him when he elected to have one copy written according to one reading, and another, in accordance with another reading. The community demonstrated such care and diligence in having the fondly-remembered readings collected in these copies that *Qirā'ah* developed into a branch of knowledge in its own right, and there rose hundreds of scholars, reciters and memorizers of the Holy Qur'ān who spent their entire spans of life to keep it preserved and protected.

What actually happened was that when Sayyidnā 'Uthman رضی اللہ عنہ sent the seven copies of the noble Qur'ān to various areas, he had also sent particular reciters who could teach how to recite them. So, when these revered reciters reached their designated areas, they taught people to read the Qur'ān in accordance with their respective readings. These different readings spread out among people. At this stage, some people bequeathed their lives to memorize different readings, and in training others to continue the discipline. This is how the foundation of the 'science of readings' was laid and people from different parts of the Islamic world started turning to the masters of the discipline to achieve the highest of excellence in it. Some memorized only one reading, others did two or three or seven, or even more than that. In this connection, a standard rule was accepted as norm throughout the *ummah* and it was invariably followed everywhere. It stipulated that only such reading (*qirā'ah*) will be accepted as being the Qur'ān which fulfils three conditions:

1. There is room for it in the script of 'Uthmani' copies of the Qur'ān.
2. It conforms to the grammar of the Arabic language.
3. It should have, provenly -- with sound authority, originated from the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم , and be well-known among the masters of readings, that is, the Imāms of Qirā'ah.

A reading which lacks even one of these three requirements cannot be considered as part of the Qur'ān. Thus a large number of readings continued to be reported in uninterrupted succession. Then, as a matter of convenience, it so happened that an Imām started giving

instructions in one, or some selected readings, and that particular reading became identified with his name. Then, scholars started writing books to collect these readings. So, Imam Abu 'Ubayd Qāsim ibn Sallām, Imām Abū Ḥātim Sijistānī, Qāḍī Ismā'īl and Imām Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī were the first among those who compiled books in this field which included more than twenty readings. Then came the great scholar, Abū Bakr ibn Mujāhid (died 324 Hijrah) who wrote a book in which he had included readings from seven *qārīs* (reciters) only. This book of his became so popular that these readings from the seven *qaris* became much more famous as compared with those of other *qaris*. In fact, some people got used to thinking that these are the only sound readings coming in uninterrupted succession. Although, the truth of the matter is that 'Allāmah ibn Mujāhid has collected these seven readings in one place just by chance. He never meant that readings other than these were wrong or unacceptable. This act of 'Allāmah ibn Mujāhid created yet another misunderstanding when some people began to think that سبعة احرف (seven versions) means just these seven readings which have been collected by ibn Mujāhid. Although, it has been explained earlier that these seven readings are simply a part of sound readings, otherwise every reading that fulfils the above-mentioned three conditions perfectly is sound, acceptable and included within the seven versions (*Hurūf*) in which the noble Qur'ān was revealed.

The Seven *Qārīs*

Anyhow, the seven *qārīs* who became most famous as a result of this act of 'Allāmah ibn Mujāhid are:

1. 'Abdullah ibn Kathīr al-Darī (died 120 Hijrah). He was fortunate enough to have seen Sayyidnā Anas ibn Mālik, 'Abdullāh ibn Zubayr and Abu Ayyūb al-Ansārī رضی اللہ عنہم from among the Companions. His reading became more famous in Makkah al-Mukarramah. Well-known among those who transmitted his rendition are Bazzī and Qambal, may Allah have mercy on them all.

2. Nafi' ibn 'Abd Al-Rahmān ibn Abī al-Nu'aym (died 169 Hijrah). He had the benefit of learning from seventy successors to the Companions who were direct disciples of Sayyidnā 'Ubayy ibn Ka'b, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās and Abū Hurayrah رضی اللہ عنہم . His reading became more famous in Madīnah and among those who transmitted

his rendition, Abū Mūsā Qālūn (died 220 Hijrah) and Abu Sa'īd Warsh (died 197 Hijrah) are better known.

3. 'Abdullāh al-Hisbī, better known as Ibn 'Āmir (died 118 Hijrah). He was fortunate to have seen Sayyidnā Nu'mān ibn Bashīr and Wāthilah ibn Asqā' رضى الله عنهم from among the Companions. He had learnt the art of Qur'ānic reading from Mughīrah ibn Shihāb al-Makhzūmī who was a disciple of Sayyidnā 'Uthman رضى الله عنه. His reading gained currency mostly in Syria, and more famous among those who transmitted his rendition are Hishām and Dhakwān.

4. Abū 'Amr Zabbān ibn al-'Alā (died 154 Hijrah). He has reported his rendition from Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās and 'Ubayy ibn Ka'b رضى الله عنهم through *Mujāhid* and Sa'id ibn Jubayr. His reading became fairly well-known in Basrah. Abū 'Umar al-Dawrī (died 246 Hijrah) and Abū Shu'ayb al-Sūsī (died 261 Hijrah) are among the more famous transmitters of his rendition.

5. Hamzah ibn Ḥabīb al-Zayyāt, ex-slave of 'Ikramah ibn Rabī' al-Taymī (died 188 Hijrah). He is a disciple of Sulayman al-A'mash, who was a disciple of Yahyā ibn Waththāb, who was a disciple of Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh, and he had the benefit of learning from Sayyidnā 'Uthmān, 'Alī and 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd رضى الله عنهم. Among his transmitters, Khalf ibn Hisham (died 188 Hijrah) and Khallād ibn Khālid (died 220 Hijrah) are more famous.

6. 'Āṣim ibn Abī al-Najūd al-Asadiyy (died 127 Hijrah). Through Zirr ibn Hubaysh, he is a disciple of 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd رضى الله عنهم and through Abū 'Abd al-Rahman Sulamī and al-Asadiyy, he is a disciple of Sayyidnā 'Alī رضى الله عنهم. More famous among the transmitters of his rendition are Shu'bah ibn 'Ayyāsh (died 193 Hijrah) and Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān (died 180 Hijrah). Generally, the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān these days is made following the rendition of this very Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān.

7. Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ḥamzah al-Kisā'ī (died 189 Hijrah). Among his transmitters, Abū al-Ḥarith Marwāzī (died 240 Hijrah) and Abū 'Umar al-Dawrī (who is also a transmitter of Abū 'Amr) are better known. The readings of the later three became more common in Kūfah.

As it has been submitted earlier that several other readings, other than these seven, are sound and have been reported in uninterrrupted succession. However, when the misunderstanding that sound readings are limited to these seven started gaining currency, several scholars (for example, 'Allāmah Shadhā'ī and Abū Bakr ibn Mihrān) collected, instead of seven, ten readings in one book. Thereupon, the term, "*Al-qirā'āt al-'ashrah*" or "Ten Readings" became famous. In these ten readings, the readings by the following three were also included in addition to those of the seven mentioned above:

1. Ya'qūb ibn Isḥāq al-Ḥaḍramī (died 205 Hijrah). His rendition was famous mostly in Baṣrah.
2. Khalf ibn Hishām (died 205 Hijrah) who is also a transmitter of the rendition of Hamzah. His rendition was common mostly in Kūfah.
3. Abū Ja'far Yazīd ibn al-Qa'qā' (died 130 Hijrah). His rendition found wider currency in Madinah al-Tayyibah.
4. Abū al-Faraj Shambūdhī (died 388 Hijrah) who was a resident of Baghdād.

Some scholars have counted Sulaymān al-A'mash among the fourteen *qārīs* in place of Shambūdhī. Out of these, the first ten readings are credited with uninterrupted succession as vouched by sound authority.

Other than these are *Shādhdh* or rare (Manahil al'Irfan with reference to Munjid al-Muqri'in by ibn al-Jazri).

The Preservation of the Holy Qur'ān

In the days of the Holy Prophet ﷺ

Since the noble Qur'ān was not revealed all at once, on the contrary, different verses from it used to have been revealed as and when appropriate, therefore, it was not possible from the very beginning to write and preserve it in a book form. So, during the initial stage of Islam, major emphasis was laid on memory as a means of preserving the noble Qur'ān. When *Waḥy* used to come in the very beginning, the Holy Prophet ﷺ would tend to repeat its words instantly so that they would be memorized well enough. Thereupon, Allah Almighty directed him through the verses of Sūrah al-Qiyāmah

that he need not repeat words in a hurry immediately as *Wahy* came. Allah Almighty would Himself endow him with a memory that he will be unable to forget the words of the *Wahy* once its descention has been completed. So it was that the moment the Qur'ānic verses would come to him, they would be committed to his memory the next moment. Thus the blessed chest of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, was the most protected vault of the noble Qur'ān, in which there was no chance of even some common mistake, editing or alteration. Moreover, as a matter of additional precaution, he used to recite the Qur'ān before angel Jibrā'il علیه السلام every year during the month of Ramadān; and the year he left this mortal world he completed a cumulative review of Qur'ānic recitation (*daur*) twice with Jibrā'il علیه السلام (Sahih al-Bukhari with Fath al-Bari, p. 36, v. 9).

Again, as it was, he would not restrict his teaching of the Companions to just the meanings of the noble Qur'ān, but had them memorize its words as well. Then, the revered Companions were themselves so enamoured with the desire to learn and remember the noble Qur'ān that everyone of them was anxious to get ahead of the other. There were women who claimed no *mahr* (dower) from their husband except that they would teach the Qur'ān.

Hundreds of Companions, freeing themselves from all other concerns, had devoted their whole lives for this purpose. Not only did they memorize the Qur'ān but also went on repeating it within their nightly prayers. When someone migrated from Makkah al-Mukarramah and came to Madīnah al-Tayyibah, says Sayyidnā 'Ubādah ibn Sāmit رضی الله عنه, the Holy Prophet ﷺ would entrust him to one of us Ansars so that he could teach Qur'ān to the newcomer. The Mosque of the Prophet was so filled with voices generated by learners and teachers of the Qur'ān that the Holy Prophet ﷺ had to ask them to lower their voices so that mistakes are not made (Manahil al-'Irfan, 1/234).

So, within a fairly short time, there was on hand a large group of the noble Companions who had the glorious Qur'ān all committed flawlessly to their memory. Included in this group were, in addition to the Four Guided Caliphs, persons like Sayyidnā Ṭalḥah, Sayyidnā Sa'd, Ṣayyidnā Ibn Mas'ūd, Sayyidnā Ḥudhayfah ibn Yamān, Sayyidnā Sālim Mowla abī Ḥudhayfah, Sayyidnā Abū Hurayrah, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar, Sayyidnā 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbās,

Sayyidnā 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, Sayyidnā 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, Sayyidnā Mu'āwiyah, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Zubayr, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn al-Ṣā'ib, Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah, Sayyidah Ḥafṣah, Sayyidah Umm Salmāh, may peace be upon them all.

In short, memorization of the Qur'ān was given more emphasis in early Islam as this was the only protected and trust-worthy method given the conditions of that time. The reason is that the number of people who could read or write was very limited in those days. The means of publishing books, such as the printing press, etc., were not there. Therefore, in that situation, if writing was taken to be sufficient, it would have neither been possible to spread out the Qur'an on an extensive scale nor to protect it reliably. In its place, Allah Almighty had blessed the people of Arabia with a memory of such dimensions that thousands of poetic lines would normally rest in the memory of one person after another. Ordinary, run-of-the-mill villagers would remember by heart their genealogies and those of their families, and unbelievably enough - even those of their horses! Therefore, this power of memory was well utilized for the conservation and protection of the noble Qur'ān and it was through it that the verses and chapters of the noble Qur'ān reached all over into the far corners of Arabia.

The writing of *Wahy*

Besides having the Qur'ān committed to memory, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم made special arrangements to have the Qur'ān committed to writing as well. Sayyidna Zayd ibn Thābit رضى الله عنه says: 'I used to write down the words of *Waḥy* for him. When *Wahy* came to him he felt burning with heat and the drops of perspiration would start rolling down on his body like pearls. When this state would go away from him, I would present myself before him with a shoulder-bone or a piece (of something else). He would go on dictating and I would go on writing. When I would be finished with writing, the sheer weight of copying the Qur'ān would give me the feeling that my leg is going to break and I would never be able to walk. In any case, when I would be finished with writing, he would say: 'Read'. I would read it back to him. If there was a shortcoming, he would have it corrected and then let it be known to people (Majma' al-Zawaid with reference to Tabrani 1/156).

Besides Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضی اللہ عنہ , there were many other Companions who carried out the duty of committing the *Wahy* to writing. Some of those who can be specially mentioned, in addition to the Four Guided Caliphs, are Sayyidnā 'Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Sayyidnā Zubayr ibn 'Awwām, Sayyidnā Mu'āwiyah, Sayyidnā Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah, Sayyidnā Khālid ibn al-Walid, Sayyidnā Thābit ibn al-Qays, Sayyidnā Abān ibn Sa'īd and others (Fath al-Bari, 9/18)

Sayyidnā 'Uthman says that it was the blessed practice of the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم that he, soon after the revelation of a certain portion of the Qur'ān, would pointedly instruct the scribe of the *Wahy* to write it in such Sūrah after such and such verse (for details see Fath al-Bari, 9/18 and Zad al-Ma'ad 1/30).

Since paper was not available in Arabia during those days, therefore, these Qur'ānic verses were mostly written on stone slabs, parchments, date branches, bamboo units. tree leaves and animal bones. However, at times, paper pieces have also been used (Ibid., 9/11).

Thus, there existed, during the times of the Holy Prophet ﷺ , a copy of the noble Qur'ān which he had arranged to be committed to writing under his supervision. Although, it was not there as a formally prepared book, but it certainly was there in the form of various units of available writing materials. Along with it, it was also the practice of some revered Companions that they would make copies of the Qur'anic verses and keep them for personal recollection. This practice was common since the very early period of Islam. Accordingly, much before Sayyidnā 'Umar رضی اللہ عنہ embraced Islam, his sister and brother-in-law had in their possession verses of the Qur'ān which they had written and kept in book form (Sirah ibn Hisham).

Preservation: In the period of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضی اللہ عنہ

However, it was characteristic of all copies of the noble Qur'ān made during the days of the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم that they were either written on different available writing surfaces, for instance, a verse would appear on parchment, another on tree leaf and yet another on a bone; or they were not complete copies. One Companion would have only a single Sūrah in his record while someone else would have five or ten Sūrahs and some others will have only a few verses. Then there were Companions having in their possession explanatory sentences as well along with the text of the verses.

On these grounds, Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضی اللہ عنہ , during his tenure of Khilafah, thought it necessary to bring together all these scattered units of the Qur'ān and thus have them preserved. The motives and the methods behind this great achievement of his have been explained in detail by Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضی اللہ عنہ when he says: "One day, soon after the battle of Yamamah, Sayyidnā Abū Bakr sent a message calling me in. When I reached him, Sayyidnā 'Umar was present there. Sayyidnā Abū Bakr said to me: 'Umar has come just now and he tells me that a large group of *Ḥuffāẓ* (those who had committed the Qur'ān to memory) have met their death as martyrs in the battle of Yamāmah. If the *Ḥuffāẓ* of the noble Qur'ān continue to meet their *shahadah* (martyrdom) in this manner, I am afraid a large portion of the Qur'ān may just go extinct. So, in my view, you should begin the task of having the Qur'ān collected together under your order'. I said to 'Umar: 'How can we do what the Holy Prophet ﷺ himself did not do?' 'Umar replied: 'By God, this is for nothing but good.' After that, this is what 'Umar continued telling me, until I too started seeing the truth, and now, my view was the same as 'Umar's'. After that Sayyidnā Abū Bakr told me: 'You are young, and intelligent. We have no doubts about you. You have been working as a scribe of *Waḥy* as well under the supervision of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ , so you search and collect the verses of the noble Qur'ān'."

Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit says: "By God, had these blessed people commanded me to haul some mountain, that would have been much less weightier than this duty of collecting the Qur'ān. I said to them: 'How are you doing something that the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم did not do?' Sayyidnā Abū Bakr said: 'By God, this is good, nothing but good.' After that, this is what Sayyidnā Abū Bakr kept saying to me again and again until Allah Almighty put my heart at rest for the same view that was the view of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr and 'Umar. Consequently, I started searching for the Verses of the Qur'ān and it was from the branches of date palms, slabs of stones and hearts of people that I finally collected the noble Qur'ān." (Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab Fada'il al-Qur'an)

At this point while we are dealing with the process of the collection of the Qur'ān, we should have a clear perception of the method used by

Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضی اللہ عنہ . As mentioned earlier, he was himself a *Ḥafiẓ* of the Qur'ān, therefore, he could have written down the whole Qur'ān from his memory. In addition to that, there were hundreds of *Ḥuffāẓ* (memorizers of the Qur'ān: plural of *Ḥafiẓ*) present at that time; the noble Qur'ān could have still been written down by entrusting the duty to a selected group from out of them.

Also, the copies of the noble Qur'ān committed to writing during the times of the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم could have been used by Sayyidnā Zayd to make his copy of the Qur'ān. But he, guided by his caution and concern, did not limit himself to any one of the many methods available. On the contrary, by using all these methods simultaneously, he did not allow any verse to be included in his master copy of the Qur'ān unless he received written and verbal testimonies proving its uninterrupted succession. In addition to that, the verses that the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم had arranged to be written under his supervision, were still preserved by the Companions. Sayyidnā Zayd collected them together so that the new copy be made from them. Consequently, a public proclamation was made to the effect that anyone possessing any number of written verses of the noble Qur'ān should bring them over to Sayyidnā Zayd. When a written verse was brought to him by someone, he used to verify its authenticity by the following four methods:

(1) To begin with, he tested its reliability against his own memory.

(2) Then, Sayyidnā 'Umar too was a *Ḥafiẓ* of Qur'ān, and as proved by reliable reports, Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضی اللہ عنہ had assigned him too to work with Sayyidnā Zayd on this project. When someone came with some verse, Sayyidnā Zayd and Sayyidnā 'Umar used to receive it jointly (Fath al-Bari with reference to ibn Abi Dawud).

(3) No written verse was accepted until such time that two trustworthy witnesses had testified to the fact that the particular verse was written in the presence of the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم (al-Itqan, 1/10)

(4) After that, these verses in writing were collated with collections that different Companions had prepared for themselves (al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an, by Zarkashi, 1/238).

If this functional methodology behind the collection of the Qur'ān

during the period of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضی اللہ عنہ is kept in mind, it would become perfectly simple to understand what Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thabit meant when he said: "I found the last verses of Sūrah al-Barā'ah beginning with: لَقَدْ جَآءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ with Sayyidnā Abū Khudhaymah رضی اللہ عنہ only. They were not found with anyone else except him."

This never means that no person other than Sayyidnā Abū Khudhaymah رضی اللہ عنہ remembered these verses, or somebody else did not have these in the written form, or anyone other than him did not know of their being part of the Qur'ān. On the contrary, it means that these verses were not found with anyone from among those who were coming along with different verses written as dicated by the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Otherwise, as far as the fact of these verses being part of the Qur'ān is concerned, everyone knew it in an uninterrupted succession. There were hundreds of Companions who remembered it as well. Moreover, these were available in writing with Companions who possessed complete collections of the Qur'ānic verses. But, among those written separately under the supervision of the Holy Prophet ﷺ this verse was found only with Sayyidnā Abū Khudhaymah رضی اللہ عنہ and not with anyone else (al-Burhan, 1/234-45).

So, in every way possible, it was with great caution and concern that Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضی اللہ عنہ, by collecting the Qur'ānic verses, wrote them out in an organized form on pages of paper (al-Itqan, 1/60).

But, each Surah was written in separate folios, therefore, this copy was composed of many folios. In the terminology of Qur'ānic Studies, this copy is called the "*Umm*" (literally, 'the mother', meaning 'the original') and it had the following features:

1. In this copy, the Qur'ānic verses were indeed arranged in accordance with the order identified by the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم, but the Sūrahs were not so arranged, rather they were written separately (Ibid).

2. Incorporated in this copy were all seven *Hurūf* (versions) of the Qur'ān (which have been explained earlier). (Manhil al'Irfan, 1/246 and Tarikh al-Qur'an by al-Kurdi, p. 28)

3. Collected here were all verses the recitation of which has not been abrogated.

4. The purpose of having this copy made in writing was to prepare an organized document with the collective endorsement of the whole *ummah*, so that, reference can be made to it when needed.

These folios committed to writing on the orders of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضی اللہ عنہ remained with him during his life-time. Then, they remained with Sayyidnā 'Umar رضی اللہ عنہ . After the martyrdom of Sayyidnā 'Umar, they were transferred to the custody of Umm al-Mu'minīn Sayyidah Ḥafṣah رضی اللہ عنہا . After the death of Sayyidah Ḥafṣah رضی اللہ عنہا , Mārwan ibn al-Ḥakam had these burnt since the copies of Qur'ān ordered by Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ were ready at that time, and a consensus of the *ummah* had already been reached to the effect that following these copies of the Qur'ān, in script and arrangement of Sūrahs, was obligatory. Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam thought it inadvisable to let any copy which was contrary to this script and arrangement remain in existence (Fath al-Bari, 9/16).

Preservation: In the period of Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ

When Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ became Khalīfah, Islam had grown out of Arabia reaching into the far-flung areas of Byzantium and Iran. As people from new areas embraced Islam, they would learn the noble Qur'ān from the Mujāhidin of Islam or from the traders because of whom they had found the blessing of Islam. On the other side, you have already read that the noble Qur'ān was revealed incorporating seven versions with various readings, and different *Ṣaḥābah* (Companions) had learnt it from the Holy Prophet ﷺ in accordance with different readings, therefore, every Companion taught Qur'an to his disciples in accordance with that particular reading which they had themselves learnt from the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم . In this manner, this difference in readings reached far-out countries. Until such time that people knew that the noble Qur'an has been revealed incorporating seven *Ḥurūf* (versions) no harm was done by this difference. However, when this difference reached those far-out countries, and the fact that the noble Qur'ān has been revealed incorporating different readings was not fully publicised there, disputes among people started showing up. Some people began to insist on their reading as correct and that of others as incorrect. On

the one hand, these disputes posed the danger that people would fall into the grave error of declaring the readings of the noble Qur'ān which have followed in uninterrupted succession as incorrect. On the other hand, there was no such standard copy available throughout the Islamic world which could become the rallying authority for the entire *ummah*, except, of course, the copy committed to writing by Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضی اللہ عنہ which was there in Madīnah. Since other copies were written individually, and in them, there was no provision to incorporate all the readings, therefore, the only reliable method to resolve these disputes was that copies which incorporate all valid readings be spread out all over the Islamic world, and then, by seeing them it could be decided as to which reading is correct and which, incorrect. Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ accomplished this very remarkable feat during the period of his *Khilāfah*.

Details of this feat, as given in *ḥadīth* narrations, inform us that Sayyidnā Hudhayfah ibn Yamān رضی اللہ عنہ was engaged in *jihād* on the Armenian-Azerbaijan front. There he noticed that differences were rising among people about readings of the noble Qur'ān. So, on his return to Madīnah, he went straight to Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ and once there, he pleaded: '*Yā Amīr al-Mu'minīn*! Before this *Ummah* falls a prey to differences in the Book of Allah like the Jews and Christians, you should do something about it.' Sayyidnā 'Uthmān asked: 'What is the matter?' In reply, Sayyidna Hudhayfah said: 'I was on a *jihād* mission fighting on the Armenian front. There I saw people of Syria following the reading of Ubayy ibn Ka'b which would not be familiar to the people of 'Irāq, and the people of Irān follow the reading of 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd which would not be familiar to the people of Syria. As a result of this, they are charging each other of being *kāfirs*.'

In fact, Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ had himself sensed the danger much earlier. He was told that there were cases right there in Madīnah al-Tayyibah itself where a teacher of the noble Qur'ān would teach the text to his disciples in accordance with one reading, and another teacher would do so in accordance with another reading. In this way, when the disciples of different teachers came together, differences would crop up between them, and there were occasions when this difference would extend to teachers, and they too, would declare each other's reading to be incorrect. When Sayyidnā

Hudhayfah ibn Yamān رضی اللہ عنہ too invited his attention to this danger, Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ convened a meeting of some highly-regarded Companions and sought their advice. He said: 'I have been informed that there are people who say to each other things like - "my reading is better than yours" - and this could touch the extreme limits of *kufr*. So, what is your opinion in this connection?' The Companions themselves asked Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ :'What are your own thoughts on this subject?' Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ said: 'I believe we should unite everyone on one Book so that we face no difference or division.' The Companions, approving of this opinion, supported Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ .

Consequently, Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ gathered people together and delivered a sermon and in it he said: "You who live so close to me in Madīnah, if you can falsify each other and differ with each other in respect of the readings of the noble Qur'ān, it is quite obvious that those who are far away from me will be indulging in falsification and disputation on a much larger scale. Therefore, let everyone get together and come up with a copy of the Qur'ān following which becomes obligatory for all."

With this in view, Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ sent a message to Sayyidah Ḥafṣah رضی اللہ عنہا requesting her to let them have the blessed folios of the Qur'ānic text (prepared under the orders of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضی اللہ عنہ which she had in her custody). He promised that these will be returned to her after copies have been made. Sayyidah Ḥafṣah رضی اللہ عنہا sent these pages of the Qur'ān to Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ. He then formed a group of four Companions which was composed of Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Zubayr, Sayyidnā Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ and Sayyidnā 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Hārith ibn Hishām رضی اللہ عنہم اجمعین . This group was entrusted with the duty of making several copies from the original copy of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr's Qur'ānic folios and making sure that Sūrahs too are arranged in order. Out of these four Companions, Sayyidnā Zayd was an Ansāri, while the rest of the three were Qurayshis. Therefore, Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ said to them: 'When you and Zayd differ in respect of any portion of the Qur'ān (that is, differ as to how a certain letter should be written) you write it in the language of the Quraysh because the noble Qur'an has been revealed in their very language."

Basically, this duty was entrusted to only four distinguished persons named above, but later on, other Companions were also attached to help them out. (Fath al-Bari, pp. 13-15, v. 9)

They performed the following functions in connection with the writing of the Qur'ān:

1. In the copy prepared during the period of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضی اللہ عنہ, Sūrahs were not placed in sequence, rather each Sūrah was written separately. They wrote down all Sūrahs in their proper sequence in a single copy. (Mustadrak, 2/229)

2. The verses of the noble Qur'ān were written in a way so that all readings backed by uninterrupted succession could be incorporated within their script. Therefore, no dots or desinential marks were placed on them so that the text could be recited in accordance with all readings that are supported by uninterrupted succession. For instance, they wrote ننسرها in order that it could be read both نَنْشُرُهَا and نُنْشِزُهَا, because both readings are correct. (Manahil al-'Irfan, 1/253-254)

3. Upto this time, there existed only one single copy of the noble Qur'ān - complete, authentically standard and collectively attested by the whole *ummah*. These distinguished persons prepared more than one copy of this newly organized *Muṣhaf* (copy of the Qur'ān).

It is generally believed that Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ had accomplished the preparation of five copies, but Abū Hātim Sijistānī says that a total of seven copies were prepared. Out of these one was sent to Makkah al-Mukarramah, one to Syria, one to Yamān, one to Bahrain, one to Baṣrah and one to Kūfah, and one was preserved in Madīnah al-Tayyibah.

4. To accomplish the task cited above, these revered elders basically worked through the pages of the Qur'ān which were written during the times of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضی اللہ عنہ. But, along with it, as a matter of added precaution, they adopted exactly the same method that was employed during the times of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضی اللہ عنہ. Consequently, assorted copies of texts committed into writing during the days of the Holy Prophet ﷺ which were preserved by different Companions were recalled once again, and it was, by yet another collation with these, that the new copies were prepared. This time, a separately written verse of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ رِجَالٌ صَدَقُوْا مَا عَاهَدُوا اللّٰهَ عَلَيْهِ was

found with Sayyidnā Thābit al-Anṣārī رضی اللہ عنہ only. As we have explained earlier, it does not mean that nobody else remembered this verse because Sayyidnā Zayd رضی اللہ عنہ has himself said: 'While writing the copy of the Qur'ān, I could not find the particular verse of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb which I used to hear the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم recite.' This shows very clearly that the verse under reference was something Sayyidnā Zayd and other Companions remembered very well. On the other hand, it also does not mean that this verse never existed in writing anywhere, because this verse was obviously there in the pages of the Qur'ān written during the times of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضی اللہ عنہ. Besides that, obviously enough, this verse was also included in the copies of the noble Qur'ān which were written and preserved by the Companions on their own. But, like it was in the days of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضی اللہ عنہ, this time too, all those scattered documents, available with the Companions in writing, were collected together, therefore, Sayyidnā Zayd رضی اللہ عنہ and others with him did not write down any verse into these copies of the Qur'ān until such time when they did find it in those written documentations as well. As such, the fact was that other verses were found written separately too with several Companions, but this verse from Sūrah al-Aḥzāb was not found written separately with anyone else except Sayyidnā Khudhaymah رضی اللہ عنہ.

5. After having these several standard copies of the Qur'ān prepared, Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ had all copies personally kept by different Companions burnt so that all copies of the Qur'ān become uniform in terms of the script, incorporation of accepted readings and the order of chapters, leaving no room for any difference between them.

The entire *ummah* acknowledged this achievement of Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ with admiration, and the Companions supported him in this venture. The only exception is that of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd رضی اللہ عنہ who was somewhat unhappy about it, something that cannot be taken up here in its proper perspective. Sayyidnā 'Alī رضی اللہ عنہ says:

"Say nothing about 'Uthmān unless it be in his favour because, by God, whatever he did in connection with copies of the Qur'ān was done in the presence of all of us, and with our advice and counsel." (Fath al-Bari, 9/15)

Steps Taken to Facilitate Recitation

After the afore-mentioned achievement of Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ, the *ummah* reached a consensus on the rule that it is not permissible to write the text of the noble Qur'ān using any method other than the 'Uthmāni Script. Consequently, all copies of the Qur'ān were, later on, written in accordance with this method, and the Companions and their successors, may Allah be pleased with them all, by bringing forth repeatedly, reproductions of the standard 'Uthmāni copies of the Qur'ān, helped spread the noble Qur'ān on a vast scale.

But, the copies of the noble Qur'ān were still devoid of dots and vowel points or desinential marks which made it difficult for non-Arabs to recite them freely. As Islam spread out wide and deep in non-Arab countries, the need to add dots and vowel points became acute, in order that people may be able to recite them easily. Several steps were taken to achieve this purpose. Their brief history is as follows:

Inclusion of Dots

The practice of placing dots over or under letters was just not there among early Arabs, however, the readers were so used to this style that they had practically no difficulty in reading dot-less writing to the limit that they would easily distinguish between doubtful letters by referring to the context. Specially, there was no possibility of any doubt in the case of the noble Qur'ān because its preservation did not rest on writing, rather on the strength of memories, pursuant to which, Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ had assigned *Qārīs*, accomplished reciters of the Qur'ān, along with its copies sent out to various parts of the Muslim world so that they could teach how to read it.

There are different reports as to who first placed dots on the copy of the noble Qur'ān. Some reports say that this feat was first accomplished by Ḥaḍrat Abū al-Aswad al-Du'ali رحمۃ اللہ علیہ (al-Burhan, 1/250). Some say he did this under the instructions of Sayyidnā 'Alī کرم اللہ وجہہ (Subh al-A'sha, 3/155). There are others who have said that Ziyād ibn Abī Sufyān, the Governor of Kufah, asked him to do this. Then there is yet another report which credits Hajjaj ibn Yūsuf with this feat who did it with the help of Ḥasan al-Basrī, Yaḥya ibn Ya'mur and Naṣr ibn 'Āṣim al-Laythī, may Allah's mercy be upon them all. (Tafsir al-Qurtubi, 1/63)

Marks for correct reading

In the beginning, like dots, the Qur'ān did not have any desinential marks either. Here too, reports are at variance as to who placed desinential marks first. Some say Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī did it first while others claim that this was accomplished by Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf through Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur and Naṣr ibn 'Āṣim al-Laythi. (Ibid)

Keeping in view all reports in this connection, it appears that desinential marks were first invented by Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī, but they were not like what they are today. Instead, placed there for *fathah* was a dot (_•_) over the letter, for *kasrah* a dot (_•) under the letter, for *ḍammah* a dot (•_) in front of the letter; and there were two dots (_••_ or _••_ or _••_) for *tanwīn* or nunnation. It was only later that Khalīl ibn Ahmad innovated the signs of *hamzah* (glottal stop) and *tashdīd* (doubling). (Subh al-A'sha, 3/160-161) After that, Hajjāj ibn Yusuf requested Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur, Naṣr ibn 'Āṣim al-Laythī and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, may Allah's mercy be upon them all, to simultaneously place dots and desinential marks on the text of the noble Qur'ān. On this occasion, the present forms of desinential marks were chosen to replace dots as expression of case signs. The purpose was to avoid confusing them with dots intrinsically belonging to letters.

Aḥzāb or *Manazil*

It was the practice of Companions and their Successors that they would complete the recital of the entire Qur'ān once every week. For this purpose, they had identified fixed portions for their daily recitation which is known as '*ḥizb*' or '*manzil*'. Thus the entire Qur'ān was divided over seven '*aḥzāb*' (plural of '*ḥizb*') '*manāzil*' (plural of '*manzil*'). (al-Burhan, 1/250)

Ajzā' or Parts

Today, the Qur'ān is divided over thirty '*ajz'ā*' (plural of '*juz*') or parts. This division in parts has nothing to do with the meaning of the Qur'ān. In fact, this division in thirty equal parts has been made to serve as teaching aid for children as, it will be noticed, there are places where the designated part ends with an unfinished statement. It is difficult to say with certainty as to who brought about this division of

the Qur'ān in thirty parts. Some people believe that Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ had arranged to have these written in thirty different folio-units while their copies were being made, therefore, this division dates back to his time for sure. But, this humble writer was unable to find any proof of this position in the writings of earlier scholars. However, 'Allāmah Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī has written that the thirty parts of the Qur'ān have been known all along and they customarily appear in copies of the Qur'ān used in schools. (al-Burhan, 1/250; Manahil al-'Irfan, 1/402)

Akhmās and *A'shār*: The sets of Fives and Tens

Another sign used in Qur'ānic copies of early centuries was that they would write the word, *khams* (خمس : five) or its abbreviation (خ) after every five verses (on the margin); and the word, *'Ashr* (عشر : ten) or its abbreviation (ع) after every ten verses. The former kind of signs were called *'Akhmās'* (a pentad or group of five) and the later, *'A'shār'* (a decade or group of ten). Consequent to another difference among early scholars, these signs were considered permissible by some, and reprehensible or *makrūh* by others. Saying, with any degree of certainty, as to who was the first to place the signs, is difficult indeed. According to one view, Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf was its inventor, while another view credits this to an order of 'Abbasi Khalīfah, al-Ma'mūn (al-Burhan, 1/251). But, these two views do not appear to be sound since the idea of *a'shār* seems to be there during the times of the Companions. For example, *Masrūq'* a well-known *Tabi'ī*, says that with Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd رضی اللہ عنہ the placement of *'A'shār'* markings in the copy of the Qur'ān was *makrūh*. (Musannaf ibn Abi Shaybah, 2/497).

Rukū' or Section

Moreover, the signs of *Akhmās* and *A'shār* were abandoned later on but, yet another sign which continues on even to this day is the sign of *rukū'* or section. This has been determined in terms of the contents of the noble Qur'ān whereby a sign of *rukū'* (the letter ع on the margin) is placed at the conclusion of a statement. Inspite of his efforts, this humble writer was unable to locate anything authentic which would tell us as to who originated the *rukū'*, and in what period. However, this much is almost certain that the purpose of this sign is to identify an average portion of verses which could be recited in one *raka'ah*. It is called *'rukū"* so that *rukū'* (bending position) could be made in *ṣalāḥ*

after reaching this point. There are 540 *rukū'āt* in the whole Qur'ān. So, by reciting one *rukū'* in every *raka'ah* of *tarāwih*, it is possible to complete the recital of the entire Qur'ān on the night of the twenty seventh (Fatawa 'Alamgiryah, Fasl al-Tarawih, 1/94).

Rumūz al-Awqāf: Stop Signs

Another useful step taken to facilitate recitation and phonetically correct pronunciation (*tilāwah* and *tajwīd*) was to provide signs with Qur'ānic sentences which could tell the nature of making a stop (breathing) there. These signs are known as the '*rumūz*' (signs) or '*alāmāt* (symbols) of *awqāf* (stops). Their purpose is to help a person who does not know Arabic to stop at the correct spot during his recitation, and thus, avoid causing a change in meaning by breaking his breath at the wrong spot. Most of these signs were first invented by 'Allamāh Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Tayfūr Sajāwandī, may Allah's mercy be upon him (Al-Nashr fi al-Qira'at al-'Ashr, 1/225). Details about these signs are given below:

ط : This letter ***Tā'*** is an abbreviated form of *al-waqf al-mutlaq*. It means that the statement stands completed at this point. Therefore, it is better to stop here.

ج : This letter ***Jīm*** is an abbreviation of *al-waqf al-jā'iz* and it means that it is permissible to stop here.

ز : This letter ***Zā'*** is an abbreviation of *al-waqf al-mujawwaz*. It means that making a stop here is correct all right, but the better choice is not to make a stop here.

ص : This letter ***Ṣād*** is an abbreviation of *al-waqf al-murakhkhaṣ*. It means that the statement has not yet been completed at this point but, because the sentence has become long, here is the place to breathe and stop rather than do it elsewhere (al-Mianh al-Fikriyyah, p. 63).

م : This letter ***mīm*** is an abbreviation of *al-waqf al-lāzim*. It means if a stop is not made here an outrageous distortion in the meaning of the verse is possible. So, it is better to stop here. Some phoneticians of the Qur'ān have also called this *al-waqf al-wājib* or the obligatory stop. But this is not '*wājib*' of *fiqh* which brings sin if abandoned. In fact, the purpose is to stress that making a stop here is the most preferable of all stops (al-Nashr, 1/231).

لا : This letter ***lā*** is an abbreviation of *lā taqif*. It means 'do not

stop here,' but it does not imply that making a stop here is impermissible, because there are certain places bearing this sign where making a stop brings no harm and making an initiation from the following word is also permissible. Therefore, the correct meaning of this sign is: If a stop is made here, it is better to go back and read over again. Initiation from the next word is not approved (al-Nashr, 1/233).

As far as the origin of these signs is concerned, it stands proved beyond doubt that they were invented by 'Allamāh Sajāwandī. In addition to these, there are some other signs as well that appear in the copies of the Qur'ān, for instance:

مع : This ***ma'*** is an abbreviation of "*mu'ānaqah*". This symbol is inserted at a place where a single verse has two possible explanations. According to one explanation, the stop will be made at one given place, while according to another explanation, this will be at another place. So, a stop can be made at either one of the two places, but once a stop has been made at one place, it is not correct to stop at the other. For instance, take the verse ذٰلِكَ مَثَلُهُمْ فِى التَّوْرَاةِ ۚ وَمَثَلُهُمْ فِى الْاِنْجِيْلِ ۚ كَزَرْعٍ اَخْرَجَ شَطْاَهٗ . If a stop is made here at التوراة , then it is not correct to stop at الانجيل and should a stop be made at الانجيل , then it is not correct to stop at التوراة . However, if a stop is not made at both places, that will be correct. It is also known as '*al-muqābalah*'. It was, first of all, pointed out by Imām Abū al-Faḍl al-Rāzī (al-Nashr, 1/237 and al-Itqan, 1/88).

سكته : This is a symbol for ***saktah***. It means one should stop here breaking the sound but not the breath. This is generally inserted at a place where assimilated reading is likely to cause an erroneous projection of meaning.

وقفه : At this sign of ***waqfah***, one must stop a little longer than *saktah* (pause). But, breath should not break here too.

ق : This letter ***qāf*** is an abbreviation of *qīla 'alaihi l'waqf*. It means that some phoneticans of the Qur'ān identify a stop here while others do not.

قف : This word is '***qif*** which means 'stop' and it is inserted where the reader may possibly think that a stop was not correct there.

صلى : This is an abbreviation of ***al-waṣlu awlā*** which means 'it is better to recite in assimilated continuity'.

صل : This is an abbreviation of ***qad yuṣalū***, that is, some stop here, while others like to recite on in assimilated continuity.

وقف النّبی صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم : This is marked at places where some *ḥadīth* report proves that the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم stopped here while reciting.

The printing of the Holy Qur'ān

Before the advent of the printing press, all copies of the Qur'ān were calligraphed by hand, and for this purpose, there always has been, in every age, a large group of calligraphers whose sole purpose in life was nothing else except the calligraphy of the Qur'ān. The amount of hard work put in by Muslims in writing the words of the Qur'ān in ever better styles, and the way they demonstrated their intense emotional involvement with this great Book has a long and interesting history of its own which would need a regular book. This is not the appropriate place to go in such details.

With the invention of the printing press, the noble Qur'ān was first printed at Hamburg in 1113 Hijrah, a copy of which is still present in Dār al-Kutub al-Misrīyyah. After that, several orientalists arranged the publication of the copies of Qur'an but they were not received with much approval in the Muslim world. After that, Mawlay 'Uthmān was the first person among Muslims who had one manuscript of the Qur'ān printed at St. Petersburg, a Russian city, in 1787 A.D. Similarly, another manuscript was printed in Qazān also. In 1828 A.D., the Qur'ān was printed by lithography on stone slabs in the Iranian city of Tehran. After that, printed copies of the Qur'ān became common throughout the world. (Tarikh al-Qur'ān by al-Kurdi, p. 186, and 'Ulum al-Qur'ān by Dr. Subhi Saleh; Urdu Translation by Ghulam Ahmad Hariri, p. 142)

An introduction to the science of *Tafsīr*

Now we can turn to the requisites of *'Ilm al-Tafsīr* or Exegesis. The literal meaning of *'tafsīr'* in the Arabic language is 'to open' or to explain, interpret or comment. Technically, the science of *tafsīr* is a branch of knowledge in which the meanings of the Qur'ān are explained and its injunctions and wisdoms are described openly and clearly (al-Burhan). Addressing the Holy Prophet ﷺ, the Glorious Qur'ān says:

وَاَنْزَلْنَا اِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ اِلَيْهِمْ

We revealed the Qur'ān to you so that you explain to the people what has been sent down to them(16:44).

Once again, the Qur'ān says:

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللّٰهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ اِذْ بَعَثَ فِيْهِمْ رَسُوْلاً مِّنْ اَنْفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُوْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهٖ وَيُزَكِّيْهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ

Surely, Allah did a great favour to Muslims when He sent a Messenger to them from among them who would recite His verses before them and purify them and teach them the Book and the Wisdom (3:164).

Keeping this in view, it should be noted that the Holy Prophet ﷺ did not only teach the words of the Qur'ān, but he also explained these in details. This is why, on some occasions, the revered Companions had to devote years together in learning a single Sūrah; details will, *inshallāh*, appear later on.

Until such time that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم graced this mortal world with his presence, seeking the explanation of any verse was not much of a problem. When the Companions faced any difficulty, they would turn to him and get a satisfying answer. But, later on after him, it became necessary that the *tafsīr* of Qur'ān be preserved as a permanent branch of knowledge so that, along with the words of the noble Qur'ān, its correct meaning as well stands protected and conserved for the Muslim *ummah*, and heretics and deviationists find no room there for distortion of its meanings. So, with the grace and *tawfīq* of Allah Almighty, this *ummah* accomplished this wonderful mission with such effeciency that today we can say without any fear of doubt or rejection that not only are the words of this last Book of Allah protected but also stands protected even that correct *tafsīr* and explanation which has reached us through the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his Companions who were ever-prepared to sacrifice their lives for him.

In what ways the Muslim *ummah* protected and preserved the *'ilm* (science) of *tafsīr*? What exrteme hardships they faced in this pursuit? How many stages did this struggle had to go through? All this has a long and fascinating history which cannot be taken up in the present

context (for this, please see *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, a detailed work on this subject by this humble writer). The intention here is to state briefly as to what are the sources of Qur'ānic exegesis and how these sources have been utilized in explaining the noble Qur'ān by all those countless books on *'Ilm al-Tafsīr* available in every language. These sources are six in number:

The Sources of *Tafsīr*

1. The Glorious Qur'ān

The first source of the knowledge of *tafsīr* is the Holy Qur'ān itself. Accordingly, it happens very often that a certain point which is brief and requires explanation is invariably clarified by some other verse of the Qur'ān itself. For instance, there appears that sentence of prayer in the Sūrah al-Fātihah: اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيْمَ صِرَاطَ الَّذِيْنَ اَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ that is, 'Guide us in the straight path - the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace...' Now it is not clear here as to who are those whom Allah Almighty has blessed. But, in another verse, they have been identified very clearly where it is said:

فَأُولٰئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِيْنَ اَنْعَمَ اللّٰهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِّنَ النَّبِيّٖنَ وَالصِّدِّيْقِيْنَ وَالشُّهَدَآءِ وَالصّٰلِحِيْنَ

So, these are the people whom Allah Almighty has blessed, being the prophets, their true followers, the martyrs (in the way of Allah) and the righteous. (4:69)

Therefore, when respected commentators explain some verse, they first check to see if a *tafsīr* of this verse is already there elsewhere in the noble Qur'ān itself. If it is there, they elect to go by it as their first choice.

2. The *Ḥadīth*

The words and the deeds of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم are called *Ḥadīth*, and as it has been stated earlier, Allah Almighty had sent him with the Qur'ān solely for the purpose that he should explain to people, openly and explicitly, the correct meanings of the noble Qur'ān. Consequently, he discharged this duty with grace and excellence both by his words and deeds. In fact his whole blessed life is, after all, a practical *tafsīr* of Qur'ān. It is for this reason that

respected commentators, in order to understand the Qur'ān, have laid the greatest emphasis on *Ḥadīth* as the second source, and it is in the light of *aḥadīth* that they have determined the meanings of the Book of Allah. However, because all sorts of narrations - sound, weak, and fabricated - are included in *Ḥadīth*, therefore research-oriented commentators do not accept a narration as trustworthy until it withstands the principles used in the scrutiny of *Ḥadīth* narrations. Hence, finding a *ḥadīth* report somewhere, looking at it, and then employing it to determine a certain *tafsīr* is not correct, because that report could be weak, even contrary to other stronger reports. This is really a very delicate matter, and venturing therein is the exclusive prerogative of those who have spent their years in mastering these fields of knowledge.

3. The Reports from the *Ṣaḥābah*

The noble *Ṣaḥābah* (Companions), may Allah be pleased with them all, had received their education directly from the Holy Prophet ﷺ. In addition to that, they were personally present on the scene when *Wahy* came, and they had themselves witnessed all circumstances and backgrounds of the revelation of the Qur'ān. Therefore, naturally, the recorded statements of these blessed souls are far more authentic and trustworthy in explaining the noble Qur'ān; the later people cannot take that place. Hence, in the case of verses the explanation of which is not found in the Qur'ān or *Ḥadīth*, statements recorded from the noble Companions are given the highest priority. Consequently, if there is a consensus of Companions on the explanation of a certain verse, the commentators follow just that, and explaining it in any way, other than that, is not permissible. By the way, if the statements of Companions differ in the interpretation (*tafsīr*) of a certain verse, then the commentators who come later examine them in the light of arguments and determine as to which interpretation or explanation can be given preference. In order to handle this situation, there is an important corpus of rules and regulations already codified under the sciences of *Usūl al-Fiqh, Usūl al-Ḥadīth* and *Usūl al-Tafsīr* a detailed discussion of which is not appropriate here.

4. The Reports from the *Tābi'īn* or Successors

After Companions (*Ṣaḥābah*) come the Successors (*Tābi'īn*). The later are those who have learnt the *tafsīr* of Qur'ān from the

Companions. Therefore, their statements too have great importance in the science of *tafsīr*, although there exists a difference among scholars whether or not the statements of the *tābi'īn* are decisive evidences in *tafsīr* (al-Itqan, 2/179) but their importance is something which cannot be denied.

5. The Arabic Language

Since the noble Qur'ān was revealed in the Arabic language, therefore, in order to explain the Qur'ān, it is necessary to have a complete mastery over the language. There are several verses of the noble Qur'ān in the background of which there happen to be just no attending circumstances of revelations, or any juristic or scholastic question, therefore, in their *tafsīr* or explanation, the sayings of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم or the statements of the *ṣaḥābah* and *tābi'īn* are not reported. For that reason, the only means through which these can be explained is that of the Arabic language, and it is on th basis of language alone that they are elucidated. Besides that, should there be some difference in the *tafsīr* of a certain verse, then, in that case too, the science of linguistics is used to run a test of veracity between varying opinions.

6. Deliberation and Deduction

The last source of *tafsīr* consists of deliberation and deduction. The subtleties and mysteries of the noble Qur'ān are an ocean with no shore, no end. Therefore, the more a person, who has been blessed with insight into the Islamic sciences by Allah Almighty, deliberates in it, the more he discovers ever-new mysteries and subtleties. As a result of this, commentators do present the outcomes of their respective deliberations as well, but mysteries and subtleties so described are found acceptable only when they do not go against the five sources mentioned above. So, should a person, while explaining the Qur'ān, come out with a subtle point or independent judgment which is contrary to the Qur'ān and Sunnah, Consensus (*Ijmā'*), Language, or the statements of Companions and Successors, or stands in conflict with another principle of Sharī'ah, that will then have no credence. Some mystics (رحمهم الله) had started describing such mysteries and subtleties in *tafsīr*, but investigative scholars of the *ummah* did not consider these trustworthy because the personal opinion of any

person against the basic principles of the Qur'ān, Sunnah and Sharī'ah has obviously no weight. (al-Itqan, 2/184)

The rules relating to Israelite reports

Judaica or *Isrā'īliyyāt* are narratives which have reached us through Jews and Christians. It may be noted that early commentators used to write down all sorts of narrations which reached them from an identified source. Many of these narrations were straight Judaica. Therefore, it is equally necessary to know what they really are. The reality is that some noble Companions and their Successors first belonged to the religion of the people of the Book, later on when they became Muslims and learnt the Qur'ān, they came across several events relating to past communities in the Qur'ān and which they had also read in the books of their previous religion. Therefore, while referring to the events mentioned in the Qur'ān they would describe other details before Muslims which they had seen in the books of their old religion. These very details have entered into the books of *tafsir* under the name of '*Isrā'īliyyāt*'. Ḥāfiẓ ibn Kathīr, who is one of the authentic research scholars, has written that there are three kinds of '*Isrā'īliyyāt*':

1. Narrations the truth of which is proved from other evidences of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, for instance, the drowning of Pharoah and and the ascent of Sayyidnā Mūsā علیہ السلام onto Mount *Tūr* (Sinai).

2. Narrations the falsity of which is proved from other evidences of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, for instance, it appears in Judaic narrations that Sayyidnā Sulaymān علیہ السلام had become (God forbid) an apostate in his later years. Its refutation is proved from the Qur'ān. It is said there: وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَانُ وَلٰكِنَّ الشَّيٰطِيْنَ كَفَرُوْا: 'It was not Sulaymān who became an infidel, but the devils did become infidels' (2:102). To cite yet another example, it finds mention in Judaic narrations that (God forbid) Sayyidnā Dawūd علیہ السلام (David) committed adultery with the wife of his general (Uriah), or, having him killed through all sorts of contrivances, ended up marrying his wife. This too is a balatant lie, and taking such narrations to be false is imperative.

3. Narrations regarding which the Qur'ān, the Sunnah and the Sharī'ah are silent, such as the injunctions of Torah etc., are subjects about which silence is to be observed as taught by the Holy Prophet ﷺ

:'Neither confirm, nor falsify'. There is, however, a difference of opinion among scholars whether or not reporting such narrations is permissible. Ḥāfiẓ ibn Kathīr has given the decisive word by saying that reporting these is permissible all right but doing so is useless because they cannot be taken as authentic. (Muqaddamah Tafsīr ibn Kathīr)

A misconception about the *tafsir* of Qur'ān

Hopefully, details given above have made it clear that the *tafsīr* (exegesis or interpretation) of the noble Qur'ān is an extremely delicate and difficult undertaking for which getting to know the Arabic language alone is not enough. In fact, it is necessary to have expertise in all related branches of knowledge. Therefore, scholars say that a *mufassir* or commentator of the Qur'ān must have vast and deep knowledge of the syntax, etymology, rhetoric, and literature of the Arabic language, as well as, that of prophetic Traditions, principles governing jurisprudence and exegesis, doctrinal articles of belief and scholastics. The reason is that one cannot arrive at correct conclusions while explaining the Qur'ān unless there be that adequacy in these fields of knowledge.

It is regretable that a dangerous epidemic has overtaken Muslims lately whereby many people have started taking the sole reading ability of Arabic sufficient for the *tafsīr* (interpretation) of the Qur'an. As a result, anyone who gets to read ordinary Arabic starts passing out opinions in the domain of Qur'ānic exegesis. Rather, it has been noticed on occasions that people having just passable familiarity with the Arabic language, and who have yet to master their Arabic to perfection, take it upon themselves to engage in explaining the Qur'ān following their whims, even going to the limit of finding faults with classical commentators. Bad come to worse, there are some subtle tyrants who would, by simply reading the translation, imagine that they have become scholars of the Qur'ān, not even feeling shy of criticising commentators of great stature.

It should be understood very clearly that this is a highly dangerous pattern of behaviour which, in matters of religion, leads to fatal straying. As regards secular arts and sciences, everyone can claim to understand that should a person simply learn the English language and go on to study books of medical science, he would not be

acknowledged as a physician by any reasonable person anywhere in the world, and certainly not trustworthy enough to take care of somebody's life unless he has been educated and trained in a medical college. Therefore, having learnt English is not all one needs to become a doctor.

Similarly, should anyone knowing English hope to become an engineer just by reading through engineering books, it is clear that no sane person in this world would accept him as an engineer. The reason is that this technical expertise cannot be acquired simply by learning the English language. It would, rather, need a formal training in the discipline under the supervision and guidance of expert teachers. When these stringent requirements are inevitable in order to become a doctor or engineer, how can the learning of Arabic language alone become sufficient in matters relating to the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*? In every department of life, everyone knows and acts upon the principle that every art or science has its own particular method of learning and its own peculiar conditions. Unless these are fulfilled, the learner's opinion in given arts and sciences will not be considered trustworthy. If that is so, how can the Qur'ān and the Sunnah become so unclaimed a field of inquiry that there be no need to acquire any art or science in order to explain them, and anyone who so wishes starts passing out opinions in this matter?

Some people say that the Qur'ān has itself stated that: وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ: 'And surely We have made the Qur'ān easy for the sake of good counsel.' And since the noble Qur'ān is a simple book, its explanation hardly needs much of a support from any art or science. But this argument is terribly fallacious, which is, in itself, based on lack of intellect and plenty of superficiality. The fact is that the verses of the Qur'ān are of two kinds. Firstly, there are the verses that offer general good counsel, relate lesson-oriented events and introduce subjects dealing with taking of warning and acting on sound advice. Examples of this are the mortality of the world, the accounts of Paradise and Hell, the discourses likely to create the fear of God and the concern for the Hereafter, and other very simple realities of life. Verses of this kind are undoubtedly easy and anyone who knows the Arabic language can benefit from their good counsel by understanding them.

It is in relation to teachings of this kind that, in the verse cited above, it was said that 'We have made them easy'. Hence, the word للذكر (for the sake of good counsel) in the verse itself is pointing out towards this meaning.

Contrary to this, the other kind consists of verses which include injunctions, laws, articles of faith and intellectual subjects. Understanding verses of this kind as they should be rightfully understood and deducing and formulating injunctions and rulings from them cannot be done by just any person unless one has the insight and permeating reach into the Islamic areas of knowledge. This is why the noble Companions, whose mother-tongue was Arabic and they did not have to go anywhere to get trained into understanding Arabic, used to spend long periods of time in learning the Qur'ān from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم . 'Allamāh al-Suyuti has reported from Imām Abū 'Abd al-Raḥman Sulami that the Companions, who formally learned the Qur'ān from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم such as Sayyidnā 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān and 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd and others, have told us that, after having learnt ten verses of the Qur'ān from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم , they would not proceed on to the next verses until such time that they had covered all that was intellectually and practically involved in the light of these verses. They used to say:

فَتَعَلَّمْنَا الْقُرْآنَ وَالعِلْمَ وَالْعَمَلَ جَمِيْعًا

We have learnt the Qur'ān, knowledge and action all in one.
(al-Itqan 2/176)

Consequently, as reported in Mu'aṭṭā' of Imām Mālik, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar رضى الله عنه spent full eight years memorizing Sūrah al-Baqarah alone and, as in the Musnad of Aḥmad, Sayyidnā Anas رضى الله عنه says that 'one of us who would learn Sūrah al-Baqarah and Sūrah 'āl-'Imrān had his status enormously raised among us.' (Ibid)

Worth noticing is the fact that these noble Companions whose mother-tongue was Arabic, who had the highest degree of expertise in poetry and letters and who would have no difficulty in having very long *qaṣīdah* poems perfectly committed to their memories with the least of effort, why would they need, just to memorize the Qur'ān and

understand its meanings, as long a time as eight years, and that too, for mastering one Sūrah? The only reason for this was that proficiency in the Arabic language was not enough to have a learning of the noble Qur'ān and areas of knowledge bearing on it. In order to do that, it was also necessary to seek the benefit of the teaching and the company of the Holy Prophet ﷺ . Now this is so obvious that the noble Companions inspite of having an expertise in the Arabic language and notwithstanding their being direct witnesses to the revelation, still needed the process of going through formal education at the feet of the blessed master in order to become the *'alims* of the Qur'ān, how then, after all these hundreds of years following the revelation of the Qur'ān, just by cultivating an elementary familiarity with Arabic, or by simply looking at translations, can anyone claim to having become a commentator of the Qur'ān? What a monsterous audacity and what a tragic joke with knowledge and religion! People who opt for such audacity should remember well that the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said:

من قال فی القرآن بغیر علم فلیتبوا مقعده فی النار

Whoever says anything about the Qur'an without knowledge, then he should make his abode in Hell. (Abu Daw'ud, as in al-Itqan, 2/179)

And he has also said:

من تكلم فی القرآن برأیه فأصاب فقد أخطأ

Whoever talks about the Qur'an on the basis of his opinion, and even if says something true in it, still he made a mistake. (Abu Daw'ud, Nasa'i)

Famous Commentaries of the Qur'ān

Countless commentaries of the Glorious Qur'ān have been written since the blessed period of the Prophethood. In fact, no other book of the world has been served as much as the noble Qur'ān. Introducing all these commentaries is not possible even in some detailed book, much less in a brief introduction such as this. But, what we wish to do here is to introduce very briefly the major commentaries that have served as particular sources of Ma'āriful Qur'ān and which have been cited there time and again. Although, during the period the above commentary was being written, many commentaries and hundreds of books were constantly referred to, but here, the purpose is to limit the introduction to commentaries the references to which will appear

repeatedly.

Tafsīr ibn Jarīr

The real name of this *Tafsīr* is Jāmi' al-Bayān and it was compiled by 'Allamāh Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (died 310 Hijrah). 'Allamāh Tabarī is a highly rated commentator, *muḥaddith* (*ḥadīth* expert) and historian. It is said that he kept writing for forty years continuously and used to write forty pages every day (al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, v. 11, p. 145). There are charges of being *Shi'ah* against him, but researchers have refuted this charge and the truth of the matter is that he is a highly regarded scholar of the followers of the Sunnah, rather one of the *Shi'ite* scholars.

Being in thirty volumes, his *Tafsīr* enjoys the status of a basic source for later commentaries. In his explanation of the verses, he quotes different scholars and then goes on to prove the position which, according to him, is weightier, of course, with arguments and proofs. It must, however, be admitted that narrations of all sorts, sound and weak, have found a place in his commentary. Because of this, not every narration presented by him can be relied upon. In reality, he was aiming through his commentary to collect and compile all narrations that could become available to him, so that this collected material could be put to use later on. Conceded is the fact that he has given the chain of reporters along with each narration so that whoever wishes to investigate into the chain of narrators could do so and decide for himself if the narrations are true or false.

Tāfsīr ibn Kathīr

Ḥāfiẓ 'Imād al-dīn Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī al-Shafi'i (died 774 Hijrah), a distinguished research scholar of the eighth century, is the author of this commentary. It has been published in four volumes. Here emphasis has been laid on explanatory narrations. A special feature is his criticism as *ḥadīth* expert on different narrations, and from this point of view, this book holds a distinct place among all books of *Tafsīr*.

Tafsīr Al-Qurṭubī

Its full name is Al-Jāmi' li-Ahkām al-Qur'ān. It was written by the famous learned writer and research scholar of Andalusia (Spain), Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Abi Bakr ibn Farah al-Qurṭubī

(died 671 Hijrah). He was a follower of the Mālikī school of *fiqh* and was known all over for his *'ibādah* and piety. The fact is that the basic objective of this book was to deduce juristic injunctions and rulings from the Qur'ān yet, while doing so, he has also provided the explanation of verses, research into difficult words, discussion of diacritical marks and elegance of style and composition, and related Traditions and Reports in his *Tafsīr*, and quite ably so. This book is in twelve volumes and has been published repeatedly.

Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr

This is the work of Imām Fakhr al-din al-Razi (died 606 Hijrah). Its real name is Mafatih al-Ghayb, but is popularly known as 'Tafsīr Kabīr'. Imām Rāzī is an *imām* of the theology of Islam, therefore, great emphasis has been laid in his *Tafsīr* on rational and scholastic debates and on the refutation of false sects. But, the truth is that this *Tafsīr* is, in its own way, a unique key to the Qur'ān as well. Furthermore, the pleasing way in which the meanings of the Qur'ān have been clarified and the mutual link of the Qur'ānic verses established, is all too praise-worthy. Most likely, Imām Rāzī himself wrote down his *Tafsīr* as far as Sūrah al-Fath. Onwards from there, he could not complete. So, the remaining part of the *Tafsīr*, from Sūrah al-Fath to the end, was completed by Qādī Shihāb al-Din ibn Khalīl al-Khawlī al-Dimashqī (died 639 Hijrah) or Shaykh Najm al-Dīn Ahmad ibn Muḥammad al-Qamūlī (died 777 Hijrah). (Kashaf al-Zunun v. 2, p. 477)

Imām Rāzī has particularly emphasised scholastic debates and the refutation of false sects in accordance with the dictates of his time, and while doing so, his discussions have become too lengthy at several places, therefore, some people have made the following comment on his *Tafsīr*: فيه كل شيئ الا التفسير : 'There is everything in this (book) except the *Tafsīr*.' But this comment is a terrible injustice to Tafsīr Kabīr. That which is the truth has already been stated above, namely, that this *Tafsīr* enjoys a high rating as far as the resolution of the meanings of the Qur'ān is concerned. But, there are places where he has explained verses of the Qur'ān while moving away from the consensus of the *ummah*, however, such places are very thinly spread out in this book that goes on to eight volumes.

Tafsīr al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ

This was written by 'Allāmah Abū Hayyān al-Gharnāṭī al-Andalūsī (died 754 Hijrah) who was a master of syntax and rhetoric in addition to other Islamic fields of learning. As a result of this, his own *Tafsīr* is soaked in syntax and rhetoric. He places special stress on investigating into the words of every verse, the difference in structures and on points of eloquence.

Aḥkām al-Qur'ān by al-Jaṣṣāṣ

This was written by Imām Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ al-Rāzī (died 370 Hijrah) who occupies a distinguished place among Hanafī jurists. The deduction of juristic injunctions and rulings from the noble Qur'ān is the subject of this book. Instead of explaining verses in serial continuity, he has taken up the juristic details as called for by verses which consist of juristic injunctions. Several other books have also been written on this subject, but this book enjoys a prominent place among those.

Tafsīr al-Durr al-Manthur

This was written by 'Allāmah Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (died 910 Hijrah). Its full name is 'al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi l'Ma'thūr.' Here 'Allāmah al-Suyūṭī has tried to collect all narrations about the *tafsīr* of Qur'ān he was able to find. Several *ḥadīth* scholars such as Hāfiz ibn Jarīr, Imām Baghawi, Ibn Mardūwayh, Ibn Hibbān and Ibn Mājah and others had already worked in this area on their own. 'Allāmah al-Suyūṭī has assembled narrations presented by all of them in this book. But, rather than refer to complete chain of authorities along with narrations, he has found it sufficient to simply name the particular author who has presented that narration under his authority so that, if needed, one could go back to the work and investigate into the ultimate authority. Since his purpose was to put together a mass of narrations, as a result of which, all sorts of narrations, sound and weak, have found their way into his book. Hence, every narration allowed entry by him cannot be considered reliable without investigation into its authority. There are occasions when 'Allāmah al-Suyūṭī does indicate with each narration the degree of its authority as well. But, as he is known to be fairly easy-going in respect of *ḥadīth* critique, it is still difficult to fully rely on that too.

Al-Tafsīr al-Maẓhari

This was written by Qādi Thanāullah Pānipati (died 1225 Hijrah). He has named this *Tafsīr* as 'Al-Tafsīr al-Maẓhari' after the name of his spritual master, Mirzā Mazhar Jān-e-Jānān Dehlavī. This *Tafsīr* of his is very simple and clear, and extremely useful to locate brief explanations of Qur'ānic verses. Along with the elucidation of Qur'ānic words, he has also taken up related narrations in ample details, and in doing so, he has made an effort to accept narrations after much more scrutiny as compared with other commentaries.

Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī

The full name of this *Tafsīr* is 'Ruh al-Ma'ani fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azim wa al-Sab' al-Mathani' and it was written by 'Allāmah Maḥmud al-Ālūsī (died 1270 Hijrah), the famous scholar of the last period of Baghdad, and comprises of thirty volumes. He has made his best possible effort to make this Tafsīr comprehensive. There are exhaustive discussions on language, syntax, letters, style, and on jurisprudence, articles of faith, scholastics, philosophy, astronomy, mysticism and related narratives of Traditions. He has made an attempt to leave no intellectual aspect pertaining to a verse unexplained. In the case of *ḥadīth* narratives as well, the author of this work has been more cautious as compared to other commentators. From this angle, this is a very comprehensive commentary, and no future venture in connection with the Tafsir of the Qur'ān can now afford to ignore its help.

AL-FĀTIHAH

(The Opening)
This Sūrah is Makkan, and comprises of seven verses

The Merits and Peculiarities of the Sūrah

This Sūrah (Chapter) of the Holy Qur'ān possesses a number of merits peculiar to it. Firstly, the Holy Qur'ān begins with it; the prescribed prayer begins with it; and even in the order of revelation this is the first Surah which was revealed to the Holy Prophet ﷺ in its complete form. Some verses of the Sūrahs Iqra' (al-'Alaq), al-Muzzammil and al-Muddaththir had no doubt been revealed earlier, but the first Sūrah to be revealed in a complete form is no other than this. Certain Companions of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم have reported that this was the first Sūrah to be revealed. Most probably they had meant that no Sūrah had been revealed in a complete form before this. Perhaps that is why the Sūrah has been named as '*Fātihatul-Kitāb*' (The Opening of the Book).

The other important peculiarity of the Sūrah is that it is, so to say, the quintessence of the Holy Qur'ān, and the rest of the Qur'ān is its elaboration. The Sūrah may thus be delineated for two reasons. Firstly, all that the Holy Qur'ān has to say is, in one way or another, related to either of the two themes, faith (*'Īmān*) and virtuous deeds (*al-'amal al-salih*), and the basic principles of the two have been

indicated in this Sūrah (See Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī and Rūh al-Bayān). That is why authentic Traditions (*Aḥadīth*) give to this Sūrah such titles as "*Umm al-Qur'ān*" (Essence of the Qur'ān), "*Umm al-Kitāb*" (Essence of the Book), "*Al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* (Glorious Qur'ān).

Secondly, this Sūrah gives a special instruction to the man who begins the recitation or the study of the Qur'ān _ that he should approach this book with a mind cleansed of all his previous thoughts and opinions, seeking nothing but the Truth and the right path, praying to Allah for being guided in the right path. The Sūrah begins with the praise of Him before whom the request is to be submitted, and ends with the request for guidance. The whole of the Qur'ān is the answer to this request. The answer begins with the words: "*Alif Lām Mīm*. This is the Book", which is an indication that the guidance man had prayed for has been provided in this Book.

The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said, "I swear by Allah who is the master of my life, neither the Torah, nor the Evangile nor the Psalms of David have anything to compare with the Opening Chapter of the Qur'ān, and no other Chapter of the Qur'ān itself can compare with it." (Reported by the Companion Abū Hurairah رضى الله عنه).

The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has also said that this Sūrah is a cure for all kinds of illnesses. According to another Tradition (*Ḥadīth*), the Sūrah has also been named the "Cure" (*Al-Shifā*), (See Qurṭubī), and al-Bukhārī reports from the Companion Anas that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has called this Sūrah the greatest among all the Sūrahs of the Holy Qur'ān. (See Qurṭubī)

﴿ بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ ﴾

(I begin) with the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful.

Bismillāh is a verse of the Holy Qur'ān

There is consensus of all the Muslims on the fact that *Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Rahīm* is a verse of the Holy Qur'ān, being a part of the Sūrah al-Naml (The Ant); and there is also an agreement on that this

verse is written at the head of every Sūrah except the Sūrah al-Taubah. But there is a difference of opinion among the *Mujtāhids* (the authentic scholars who are entitled to express an opinion in such matters) as to whether this verse is an integral part of the Sūrah al-Fatihah or of all the Sūrahs or not. According to the great Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, it is not an integral part of any Sūrah except al-Naml, rather it is in itself an independent verse of the Holy Qur'ān which has been revealed for being placed at the beginning of every Surah in order to separate and distinguish one Sūrah from another.

The merits of *Bismillāh*

It was a custom in the Age of Ignorance (*Jāhiliyyah*) before the advent of Islam that people began everything they did with the names of their idols or gods. It was to eradicate this practice that the first verse of the Holy Qur'ān which the Archangel Jibrā'īl brought down to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم commanded him to begin the Qur'ān with the name of Allah اِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ: "Read with the name of your Lord."

The famous commentator al-Suyuti says that beside the Holy Qur'ān all the other divine books too begin with *Bismillāh*. Certain other scholars are of the opinion that *Bismillāh Al-Raḥmān Al-Rahīm* is peculiar to the Qur'ān and to the followers of Muḥammad ﷺ. The two views can be brought into agreement with each other if we say that all the divine books share the common trait of beginning with the name of Allah, but the words *Bismillāh Al-Raḥmān Al-Rahīm* are peculiar to the Holy Qur'ān, as is evident from certain Traditions (*Aḥadīth*) which report that in order to begin with the name of Allah anything he undertook, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم used to say the words بِاسْمِكَ اللّٰهُمَّ (*Bismikā Allāhumma*), but when the verse *Bismillah Al-Rahman Al-Rahim* was revealed, he adopted these words. Since then this practice was established through the verbal command of the Holy Prophet ﷺ or through his act or tacit approval). (See Qurṭubī and Rūh al-Ma'ānī)

The Holy Qur'ān again and again instructs us to begin what we do with the name of Allah. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said that no important work receives the blessings of Allah, unless it is begun

with His name. According to yet another *ḥadīth* (Tradition), closing the door of one's house, putting out the lamp, covering a vessel, should all be done with the recitation of *Bismillāh*. The Holy Qur'ān and the *aḥādīth* (Traditions) repeatedly instruct us to recite this verse while taking food, drinking water, performing the *wudū* (ablution), getting on a carriage or getting down from it. (See Qurṭubī)

By instructing man to begin everything with the name of Allah, Islam has given to the whole of his life an orientation towards Allah so that he may, with each step he takes, renew his allegiance to the covenant with Allah that nothing he does, not even his very being can come into existence without the will and the help of Allah. Thus, all the economic and worldly activities of man, each movement and gesture becomes transformed into an act of worship.[1] How brief is the action, which consumes neither time nor energy, and yet how immense is the gain -- it is a regular alchemy, transmuting the profane (*dunyā*) into the sacred (*dīn*); a disbeliever eats and drinks just as a Muslim does but in saying *'Bismillāh'* as he begins to eat, the Muslim affirms that it was not in his power to obtain this little morsel of food which has passed through innumerable stages from the sowing of the seed to the reaping of the grain corn, and which has during this process required the labours of the wind, the rain, the sun, of the heavens and of the earth, and of a thousand men -- and that it is Allah alone who has granted him this morsel of food or this draught of water by making it go through all these stages. A disbeliever goes to sleep, wakes up and goes about as much as a Muslim. But while going to sleep or waking up, the Muslim mentions the name of Allah, renewing his relationship with Him. Thus his economic and worldly needs and activities acquire the nature of the remembrance of Allah, and are counted as acts of worship. Similarly, in saying *'Bismillāh'* while getting on to a carriage, the Muslim testifies to the fact that it is beyond the power of man to produce this carriage and to procure it for him, and that it is only the infallible and divinely-created order of

1. This is the only way in which human life can, to use a word dear to modern cultural anthropology, be sacralized in any meaningful sense of the term -- Translator

things that has brought together from all the corners of the world the wood, the steel and other metals which have gone into the making of the carriage, as well as the mechanics who have given a particular shape to these components, and the driver -- and finally put all these into the service of man who can make use of the labour of this army of the creatures of man who can God by spending a few coins. And even these coins have not been created by him, it is Allah himself who has provided the complex ways and means of earning them. Veritably, *'Bismillāh'* is the legendary philosopher's stone which transmutes, not copper, but mere dust into the purest of gold. فَلِلّٰهِ الْحَمْدُ عَلٰى دِيْنِ الْإِسْلَامِ وَ تَعْلِيْمَاتِهٖ :'So then, praised be Allah for the religion of Islam and its teachings.'

Ruling

'Before beginning to recite the Qur'ān, it is *sunnah* to first say أَعُوْذُ بِاللّٰهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطٰنِ الرَّجِيْمِ (I seek refuge with Allah from Satan -- the accursed) and then بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ (I begin with the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful). And during the *tilāwah* (the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān) as well, saying بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ: *'Bismillah...* at the beginning of each Sūrah, except the Sūrah Al-Bara'ah (al-Taūbah), is *Sunnah*.

Commentary

'Bismillāh': This phrase is composed of three words -- the letter *'Bā'*, *'Ism'* and 'Allah'. The preposition *'Ba'* has several connotations in Arabic, three of which are appropriate to the occasion. All the three are applicable here: (1) Contiguity, or the close proximity between one thing and the other; (2) Seeking the aid of someone or something; (3) To seek the blessings of someone.

The word *'Ism'* has many lexical and intellectual nuances of meaning, the knowledge of which would not be essential for the average reader. It is sufficient to know that this word is translated in English as 'Name'.

The word, 'Allah' is the greatest and the most comprehensive of the divine names. According to some scholars, it is the 'Great Name', or *'Al-Ism al-Ā'zam'*. (According to the Tradition (*Ḥadīth*), the Great Name carries with it such a benediction that a prayer is granted when this word has been uttered. Reports differ as to what this Great Name

is). The word 'Allah' refers to the Essence, and hence this name cannot be given to anyone except Allah. That is why this word has neither a plural nor a dual, for Allah is One and has no associate. In short, Allah is the name of that Ultimate Reality which comprehends in Itself all the attributes of perfection, which is the creator and sustainer, unique and peerless.

Thus, the phrase *'Bismillāh'* has these three respective significations according to the three connotations of the preposition *'Ba'*:

(a) With the name of Allah

(b) With the help of the name of Allah

(c) With the *barakah* or benediction of the name of Allah.

But, in all the three forms, the phrase obviously remains incomplete unless one mentions the work which one intends to begin with the name of Allah or with its help or benediction. So, according to the rules of grammar, some verb is taken to be understood here which should be suitable for the occasion -- e.g., 'I begin or recite with the name of Allah.' Propriety demands that even this verb should be understood to occur after the phrase, so that one does actually begin with the name of Allah and the verb does not precede His name. The preposition *'Bā'* has, however, to be placed before the name of Allah, for it is an exigency of the Arabic language. But even in this respect the 'Uthmāni manuscript of the Holy Qur'ān prepared by the third Caliph 'Uthmān رضی اللہ عنہ has made the necessary modification in accordance with the consensus of the Companions of the Holy Prophet صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم. The regular Arabic script requires the letter *'Bā'* here to be joined with the letter *'Alif'*, producing this shape -- بِاسْمِ اللّٰہِ. But the 'Uthmani manuscript has dropped the *'Alif'*, and joined the letter *'Bā'* with the letter *'Sīn'*, making the *'Bā'* look like a part of the word *'Ism'*, so that the beginning is made, in effect, with the name of Allah. That is why the letter *'Alif'* is not dropped in other combinations between the preposition *'Bā'* and the noun *'Ism'* -- for example, in the verse اِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ (*Iqrā' biismi Rabbik*), the *'Alif'* is written along with the *'Bā'*. It is the peculiarity of *'Bismillāh'* alone that the letter *'Ba'* has been joined with the letter *'Sīn'*.

Merciful) -- these two are the attributes of Allah Almighty. *'Raḥmān'* signifies one whose mercy is common to all, and extends to the whole universe, to everything that will be created in the future. On the other hand, *'Raḥīm'* signifies one whose mercy is perfect in all possible ways. That is why *'Raḥmān'* is the exclusive attribute of Allah and the word is employed only when one is referring to Him. It is not permissible to qualify any created being as *'Raḥmān'*, for there cannot possibly be anyone else, beside Allah, whose mercy should be all-embracing and all-inclusive. Just like the word 'Allah', there is no dual or plural for the word *'Raḥmān'* too, because these words are in their signification exclusive to the One and Absolute Being which does not permit the existence of a second or a third. (Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī) The signification of the word *'Rahim'*, on the contrary, does not contain anything which it should be impossible to find in a created being, for a man may be perfectly merciful in his dealings with another man. So, the word *'Rahim'* may justifiably be employed in the case of a human being -- as the Qur'ān itself has used the word in speaking of the Holy Prophet ﷺ which is: بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ (He is gentle and very merciful towards the Muslims).

Ruling: This would easily show that those who shorten names such as 'Abd al-Raḥmān or Fadl al-Rahman into *'Raḥmān'* are doing what is not permissible and are thus committing a sin.

Out of the 'Beautiful Names' (اَلْاَسْمَآءُ الْحُسْنٰى : *Al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā*) of Allah Almighty and His attributes of perfection, only two have been mentioned in this verse - namely, *'al-Raḥmān'* and *'al-Rahīm'* -, and both have been derived from the root *'Rahmah'* (mercy), indicating the all-pervasiveness and perfection of divine mercy. It points to the fact that the creation of the heavens and the earth and the sustenance of the whole universe has no other motivation than making manifest Allah's quality of mercy. He Himself had no need of these things, nor could anyone compel Him to create them. It is His own mercy which has required the creation and sustenance of the whole universal order.

How aptly this was put in Persian by poet *Rūmī*:

مانبودیم و تقاضا ما نبود
لطف تو ناگفته مامی شنود

There was nothing -- neither our being nor our claim to be;
It was Thy mercy that heard our unsaid.

Injunctions and related considerations

The Holy Qur'ān says: فَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ :'When you recite the Qur'ān, seek the protection of Allah against Satan, the rejected one'.

According to the consensus of *Ummah*, it is a *Sunnah* to say *ta'āwwudh*: أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ 'before the recitation of the Holy Qur'an whether in *Salāh* or out of *Salāh* (*Sharah al-munyah*). Saying *ta'awwudh* is peculiar to the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān. Therefore, with the exception of *tilawah*, all other chores should be taken up by first saying *'Bismillāh'* only. Saying *ta'awwudh* is not a *sunnah* there. ('Alamgiri, Chapter 4 - Al-Karahiyah)

One should begin the recitation of the Qur'ān by reciting both أعوذ ... بالله (I seek the protection of Allah) and بِسْمِ اللَّهِ (*Bismillāhi*: I begin with the name of Allah). During the recitation, one should repeat *'Bismillāh'*, but not *'A'udhubillāh'*, when one comes to the end of a Sūrah (or Chapter) and begins the next Sūrah -- with the sole exception of the Sūrah 'Al-Bara'ah' (اَلْبَرَاءَةُ). If one comes upon this particular Sūrah in the course of the recitation, one should not say *'Bismillāh'* before reading it. But if one happens to begin the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān with this Sūrah, one should recite *'A'udhubillāh'* and *'Bismillāh'* both (Alamgiriah from Al-Muḥīt).

'Bismillāh al-Rahmān al-Rahim' is a verse of the Holy Qur'ān and a part of the verse in Sūrah 'al-Naml'; it is also a regular verse when it occurse between two Sūrahs. It must, therefore, be treated with as much respect as the Holy Qur'ān itself, and it is not permissible to touch it without having performed *wudu* (ablution). In the state of major ritual impurity (e.g., after the emission of semen, or during menstruation, or after child-birth), it is not allowed to even read this verse as recitation of the Holy Qur'ān before having taken a ritual bath. One may, however, recite it as a form of prayer before beginning a work, like taking one's meals or drinking water under all conditions.

Rulings:

(1) It is a *Sunnah* to recite *'Bismillāh'* after *'A'udhū-billah'* at the very beginning of the first *raka'ah* in the *salāh*. But views differ as to whether it should be recited in a loud or a low voice. Īmām Abū

Hanifah and certain other Imāms prefer it to be done in a low voice. There is a consensus on the point that *'Bismillāh'* should be recited at the beginning of all the succeeding *raka'ahs* too. This is unanimously considered to be a *Sunnah*; however, in some narrations, the reciting of *'Bismillāh'* at the beginning of every *raka'ah* has been identified as *wajib* or necessary.

(2) In the course of *salāh*, whether one is reciting the Holy Qur'ān loudly or silently, one should not recite *'Bismillāh'* before beginning a Sūrah just after the Sūrah 'Fatihah'. Such a practice has not been reported either from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم or from any of the first four *Khulafā'*. According to *Sharh al-munyah*, this is the view of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah and of Imām Abu Yusuf, and Shrah al-munyah, al-Durr al-Mukhtar, al-Burhan etc. prefer it to other views. But Imām Muḥammad considers it to be preferable that one should recite *'Bismillah'* if one is reciting the Holy Qur'an in a *salāh* offered silently. Certain reports attribute this view even to Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, and al-Shāmi has quoted some Muslim jurists in support of this view -- which has been adopted even in 'Bahishti Zewar' of Maulanā Thānavi. Anyhow, there is a complete agreement among the scholars that it is not *makrūh* or reprehensible for some one to recite *'Bismillāh'* in this situation.

SŪRAH AL - FĀTIḤAH

(The Opening)

MAKKAN **VERSES: 7**

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ ۝

اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ رَبِّ الْعٰلَمِيْنَ ۝ اَلرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ ۝ مٰلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّيْنِ ۝
اِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَ اِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِيْنُ ۝ اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيْمَ ۝
صِرَاطَ الَّذِيْنَ اَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ ۙ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوْبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا
الضَّآلِّيْنَ ۝

With the name of Allah,
the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful.

Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful, the Master of the Day of Judgment. You alone we worship, and from You alone we seek help. Guide us in the straight path -- the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace, not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.

This Sūrah comprises seven verses. Of these, the first three are in praise of Allah, while the last three contain a request or a prayer on the part of man, which Allah himself has, in His infinite mercy, taught him. The verse in between the two sets has both the features -- there is an aspect of praise, and another of prayer.

The Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim reports from the blessed Companion Abū Hurayrah a *ḥadīth* (Tradition) of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم : "Allah has said, 'The *salāh* (i.e., the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah) is equally

divided between Me and My servant. And My servant shall be given what he prays for." The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم continued: "When the servant says:

اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ رَبِّ الْعٰلَمِيْنَ

Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds,

Allah says: "My servant has paid his homage to Me." When he says:

اَلرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

The All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful,

Allah says: "My servant has praised Me." When the servant says:

مٰلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّيْنِ

The Master of the Day of Judgment,

Allah says, "My servant has proclaimed my greatness." When the servant says:

اِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَ اِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِيْنُ

You alone we worship, and to You alone we pray for help,

Allah says, "This verse is common to Me and My servant. He shall be given what he has prayed for." When the servant says:

اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيْمَ

Guide us in the straight path...,

Allah says: "All this is there for My servant. He shall be given what he prays for." (Mazharī)

The Sūrah begins with the words *Al-hamdulillāh*, signifying that all praise essentially belongs to Allah. Whosoever praises anything anywhere in the world is ultimately praising Allah. The sensible world contains millions of things which compel man's attention and admiration for their beauty and usefulness, but if one tries to look behind the veil of appearances, one would find in each and every thing the manifestation of the same creative power. Admiring anything that exists in the created world is no more than showing one's admiration

for a work of art or craft, which in fact is a praise of the artist or the craftsman. This small statement of the Holy Qur'ān opens a new perspective for man lost in the labyrinth of multiplicity, and shows him how the many are knit together in the same unity, and how all praise in reality belongs to One whose power is absolute, and that it is only in our ignorance or indifference that we regard this praise to be due to anyone else.

If there is only one Being in the whole universe who inherently deserves all praise, it necessarily follows from it that this Being alone should be worthy of adoration and worship. Thus we can see that although the phrase, *Al-hamdulillāh*, has been used to signify praise, yet, by implication, it cuts the very root of polytheism or the worship of created beings, and at the same time brings out in a self-evident manner the first and the basic principle of the Islamic creed -- Oneness of God.

The next phrase to follow in the Sūrah speaks of an attribute of Allah -- Lord of the Worlds. Lexically, the word, *Rabb* signifies 'one who nurtures'. And 'nurture' implies developing a thing by gradual stages in a manner which is conducive to its own good till it attains perfection. The word, *Rabb* is exclusive to the sacred Being of Allah, and cannot be employed in the case of any created being without adding some qualification, for a created being is itself in need of 'nurture', and cannot nurture anyone else.

Al-'alāmīn is the plural of *'alam* (world, universe, kingdom). "The worlds" include all possible forms of -- existence: the sky, the earth, the sun, the moon, stars, wind and rain, the angels, the jinns, animals, plants, minerals, and, of course, men. So, 'the Lord of all the worlds" means that Allah alone gives nurture to all the forms of existents that are to be found in this universe, or in the millions of universes that may lie beyond our own universe in the outer space. Imām Rāzī, the great commentator of the Holy Qur'ān, says that the existence of an indefinite space beyond our universe can be proved on the basis of rational argument, and it is also certain that Allah is All-Powerful, so it should not be at all difficult for Him to have created millions of other universes in this endless space. It has been reported from the Companion Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī رضى الله عنه that there are forty thousand

worlds; our world, stretching from the East to the West, is only one of them, there being many more besides it. According to the well-known commentator *Muqatil*, the number of worlds is eighty thousand. (See Qurṭubī)

As for the objection that no man or animal can live in the outer space owing to the lack of the kind of air which should be compatible with the physical make-up of man, Imām Rāẓī replies that the inhabitants of the worlds in the outer space need not necessarily have the same physical make-up as that of the inhabitants of our world which should make existence in space impossible for them, and suggests that their organic composition and the requirements for its nourishment and sustenance might just be totally different.

Imām Rāẓī postulated these possibilities some eight hundred years ago without the help of the modern facilities for observation and exploration, yet the speculations of the scientists in the age of space travel endorse his view.

Seen in the light of this short phrase, 'Lord of the worlds', the universe reveals itself to be an incredibly complex, yet perfectly integrated order. From the heavens to the earth, from the planets and the stars to the particles of dust, everything is bound in a chain of being, and is performing the function assigned to it by Divine Wisdom. Man cannot obtain a little morsel of food unless a thousand forces of the sky and the earth work together to produce it. The universal order is there for man to contemplate, and to realize that, if Allah has put millions of His creatures in the service of man, man in his turn cannot be worthless or purposeless or meaningless.[2] The Holy Qur'ān is indeed very explicit and very insistent in reminding us that the universe is not absurd:

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَآءَ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا بَاطِلًا ذٰلِكَ ظَنُّ الَّذِيْنَ كَفَرُوْا فَوَيْلٌ لِّلَّذِيْنَ كَفَرُوْا مِنَ النَّارِ

We have not created in vain the heavens and the earth and what lies between them. That is the fancy of the disbelievers. But woe to the disbelievers in the fire of Hell. (38:27)

2. As do proclaim the current Western philosophies of the Absurd and of Unreason.

If the universe is not in vain or absurd, man too, whose purposes the universe has been made to serve, cannot be purposeless and meaningless. The Holy Qur'ān defines the Divine purpose in creating man and the goal of his existence in these words.

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

I have not created the jinn and mankind except to worship Me. (51:56)

It may be said that the phrase 'the Lord of all the worlds' is in a way the proof of the claim made in the earlier phrase اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰه : (all praise belongs to Allah). When Allah alone is the ultimate cause for the nurture of the whole universe, He alone can, in reality, be worthy of praise. Thus, the first verse of the Surah, as we said before, combines in itself the praise of Allah and a subtle indication of the first and basic principle of the Islamic creed -- the oneness of God.

The second verse speaks of the Divine quality of mercy, employing two adjectives *Raḥmān* and *Raḥīm*, both of which are hyperbolic terms in Arabic, and respectively connote the superabundance and perfection of Divine mercy. The reference to this particular attribute in this situation is perhaps intended to be a reminder of the fact that it is not through any external compulsion or inner need or any kind of necessity whatsoever that Allah has assumed the responsibility of nurturing the whole of His creation, but in response to the demand of His own quality of mercy. If this whole universe did not exist, He would suffer no loss; if it does exist, it is no burden to Him.

The third verse pays homage to Allah as 'the Master of the Day of Judgment or Requital': مٰلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّيْنِ . The word *Mālik* has been derived from the root, '*milk*' (ملك) which signifies possessing a thing in such a manner that one has the right and power to dispose of it as one likes (See Qamus). The word *Dīn* signifies 'Requital'. So, the phrase 'Master of the Day of Requital' implies total mastery on the Day of Requital. But there is no mention of the thing or things to which this mastery or possession would apply. According to the commentary, '*al-Kashshaf*', the phrase makes a general reference to cover everything. That is to say, on the Day of Requital the mastery over everything that exists will belong to Allah alone.

The Day of Requital is real and rational:

Before we proceed, let us consider two important questions: Firstly, what is this Day of Requital? Secondly, Allah being the Master, of everything even today as much as on the Day of Requital, why does this verse specifically mention the Day of Requital? The Day of Requital or the Day of Judgment is the Day appointed by Allah to recompense good or evil deeds.[3] The world is only the field of action, the place where one is required to perform one's duty, and not the place for receiving one's reward. The mere fact that man happens to be healthy and wealthy or powerful does not necessarily argue that he has won the pleasure and favour of Allah. Similarly, the mere fact that a man happens to be ill or poor or weak or miserable does not by itself indicates that he is the object of Allah's wrath. Even in the case of worldly life, would it not be a platitude to remark that a man sweating in a factory or an office does not consider it a misfortune? In fact, try to deprive him of this opportunity to sweat, and you would have earned his deepest displeasure; for beyond all this toil he can glimpse the reward he is going to get after thirty days in the shape of his wages.

It proceeds from this principle that the greatest sufferings in this world are the lot of the Prophets عليهم السلام and, after them, of the men of Allah, and yet we see them quite content and even happy. In short, physical well-being or worldly glory or luxury is no sure indication of one's virtue and truthfulness, nor is sorrow and suffering that of one's misdeeds and falsity. It may, however, happen that a man receives some punishment or reward for his deeds in this world. This never is the full recompense, but only a faint model which has been manifested to serve as an intimation or warning. The Holy Qur'ān has spoken very clearly on this point:

وَلَنُذِيقَنَّهُمْ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَدْنَىٰ دُونَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَكْبَرِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

And We shall surely let them taste a nearer punishment (in

3. The verse qualifies Allah specifically as 'Master of the Day of Requital', and thus emphasizes a principle which is in itself of the highest import, and is particularly relevant to certain tendencies in the modern habits of thought. Contrary to the modern conviction which one finds reflected even in the so called "new interpretations" of Islam, individual or collective well being is not the be-all and end-all of human existence, nor is the physical world the place where good or evil deeds are recompensed -- Translator

this world) before the greater punishment (in the other world), so that they may return (to the right path). (32:21)

كَذَالِكَ الْعَذَابُ وَ لَعَذَابُ الْاٰخِرَةِ اَكْبَرُ لَوْكَانُوْا يَعْلَمُوْنَ

Such is the punishment; and the punishment of the other world is certainly greater, only if they knew. (68 : 33)

The sufferings of this world, as even its joys, are sometimes a trial, and sometimes a punishment, but never a full recompense, for the world is itself transitory. What really counts is the joy or suffering that will endure for ever, and which one will come to know in the other world beyond this world. Given the fact that good or evil deeds are not fully recompensed in this world, and the rational and just principle that good and evil not being equal in value, every deed should be rewarded or punished according to its nature, it readily follows that beyond this world there should be another world where every deed, big or small, good or evil, is to be judged, and then justly rewarded or punished. This the Holy Qur'ān calls *Al-Akhirah*: الآخرة (The world-to-come), or *Al-Qiyāmah*: القيامه (Doomsday or the Day of Judgment), or *'Yawm al-din*, (Day of Requital). The whole idea has been explained by the Holy Qur'an itself:

مَا يَسْتَوِى الْاَعْمٰى وَالْبَصِيْرُ وَالَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا وَعَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ وَلَا الْمُسِيْٓءُ قَلِيْلًا مَّا تَتَذَكَّرُوْنَ ۝ اِنَّ السَّاعَةَ لَاٰتِيَةٌ لَّارَيْبَ فِيْهَا ، وَلٰكِنَّ اَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يُؤْمِنُوْنَ ۝

The blind are not equal with the seeing, nor the wrong-doers with those who believe and do good deeds. Yet you seldom reflect. The hour of retribution is sure to come, no doubt about it, yet most people do not believe. (40 : 58-59)

Who is the Master ?

Now, we come to the second question. It should be obvious, on a little reflection, to everyone that the real master of every particle of dust in the universe can only be He who has created and nurtured it, Whose mastery over everything is complete, having neither a beginning nor an end, covering the living and the dead, the apparent and the hidden, the seen and the unseen. On the contrary, the mastery of man is delimited by a beginning and an end; it has a 'before' when it did not exist, and an 'after' when it will exist no more. Man's mastery and control extends to the living, not to the dead, to the seen, not to

the unseen, to the external aspect of things, not to the internal. All this would show to those who can see that the real Master of the whole universe, not only on the Day of Requital but even in this world, is no other than Allah. Then why should this verse specify the Day of Requital ?

The verses of the Sūrah al-Mū'min / Ghafīr (Chapter 40) serve as a commentary on the phrase under discussion, and provide a clear account of the Day of Requital. The real and complete mastery over everything, no doubt, belongs to Allah alone even in this world. Yet Allah Himself, in His beneficence and wisdom, has granted a kind of imperfect, temporary and apparent mastery to man as well; and the *Sharī'ah*, in laying down laws for worldly affairs, has given due consideration to man's limited right to ownership. But today, in possessing lands or money or power, which has been given to him by way of trial, man has always been prone to get drunk with pride and vanity.[4] The phrase 'Master of the Day of Judgment' is a warning to man reeling in his forgetfulness and self-conceit, and an intimation that all his possessions, all his relationships with things and men are only short-lived, and that there shall come a Day when masters will no more be masters and slaves no more slaves, when no one will own anything even in appearance, and the ownership and mastery, apparent as well as real, of the whole universe will be seen to belong to none but Allah, the Exalted. The Holy Qur'ān says:

يَوْمَ هُمْ بَارِزُوْنَ لَا يَخْفٰى عَلَى اللّٰهِ مِنْهُمْ شَيْءٌ ۭ لِمَنِ الْمُلْكُ الْيَوْمَ لِلّٰهِ الْوَاحِدِ الْقَهَّارِ ۝ اَلْيَوْمَ تُجْزٰى كُلُّ نَفْسٍۢ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ ۭ لَا ظُلْمَ الْيَوْمَ ۭ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ سَرِيْعُ الْحِسَابِ ۝

The day they will present themselves (before Allah), and nothing of theirs will remain hidden from Allah (even apparently). 'Whose is the kingdom today?' Of Allah alone, the One, the Mighty. Today everyone will be recompensed for what he has done. Today no one will be wronged. Allah's reckoning is surely swift. (40:17)

The fourth verse إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَ إِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِيْنُ : 'You alone we worship, and from You alone we seek help' has a double aspect, one of praise and

4. Specially the modern man living in the so-called 'humanistic civilization' when the sole drive and motivating force is the complacent belief in man's mastery.

another of prayer. A man's life is subject to three states of time -- past, present and future.

The first two verses of the Sūrah, اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ (All Praise belongs to Allah) and اَلرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ (the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful), remind man that, as far as his past and present are concerned, he owes everything to Allah alone, for it is Allah who created him out of nothing, endowed him with the best form in the universe, and with reason and intuition, and continues to sustain and nurture him in the present. The third verse: مٰلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّيْنِ (Master of the Day of Judgment) tells him that in the future too he will have to depend on Allah alone, for on the Day of Requital one cannot possibly have a helper other than Allah. The three verses having made it clear that man is totally and absolutely dependent on Allah in all the three states of his life, it logically and naturally leads to the conclusion that Allah alone is worthy of being worshipped, for in Arabic the word *'ibādah* (worship) connotes showing the utmost humility and submissiveness out of an intense respect and love for someone, and such an attitude of willing self-abasement cannot justly be adopted towards anyone except Allah. So, the phrase: اِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ (You alone we worship) expresses this very natural and logical conclusion. And once it has been understood that there is only one Being who can satisfy all our needs, it is equally natural and logical to turn for help in everything to Him alone. Hence the phrase اِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِيْنُ (to You alone we pray for help). Beside these two aspects, the fourth verse has another dimension as well. It teaches man not to worship anyone except Allah, not to consider anyone else as being really capable of satisfying his needs, and not to beg anyone else to satisfy these needs. It does not, however, go against this principle if, in praying to Allah, one mentions the name of a prophet or a man of Allah by way of a medium (*wasilāh*) for drawing the mercy of Allah upon oneself.

It may also be noticed that the phrase: اِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِيْنُ (to You alone we pray for help) does not mention the purpose for which help is being sought. According to most of the commentators, it generalizes the idea of the request to cover everything from acts of worship to all possible worldly or other-worldly concerns.

Then, acts of worship (*'Ibādah*) are not limited merely to prescribed prayers or fasting. Imām al-Ghāzzāli in his book 'Arba'in' has enumerated ten forms which worship can take:-

1. Prayers.
2. Prescribed Alms-giving.
3. Fasting.
4. Hajj or pilgrimage to Makkah.
5. Reciting the Holy Qur'ān.
6. Remembrance of Allah in all possible situations.
7. Earning one's livelihood in accordance with the regulations of the *Sharī'ah*.
8. Fulfilling one's obligations towards one's companions and neighbours.
9. Persuading people to act righteously and dissuading them from what is reprehensible and forbidden.
10. To follow the *Sunnah*, or the practice of the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

Therefore, not associating anyone with Allah in worship means that one should not love or fear or depend on anyone else as one loves or fears or depends on Allah, nor should one repose one's hope in anyone else, nor should one consider obedience or submission or service to another as obligatory as the worship of Allah, nor make a votive offering or consecrate or dedicate anything to anyone or take a vow in the name of anyone similar to the way one does these things in the case of Allah, nor should one show complete self-abasement and total humility before anyone as one is required to do before Allah, nor should one engage in the particular God-oriented acts of worship for anyone other than Allah, acts which symbolize the farthest limits of self-abasement, such as, *ruku'* and *sajdah* (the bowing and prostrating in *salāh*).

The Prayer for Guidance

The last three verses of the Sūrah consist of a prayer on the part of man. In other words, Allah Himself, in His great mercy, has taught man what to pray for:

اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيْمَ ۝ صِرَاطَ الَّذِيْنَ اَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ ۙ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوْبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّآلِّيْنَ ۝

Guide us in the straight path, the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace, not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.

The Implications of Guidance

A problem of highest significance arises here. The teaching with regard to the prayer for being guided in the straight path is addressed equally to all men or all Muslims and to saints and prophets who have already received guidance and are even a source of guidance for other men. Why should these repeatedly pray for something they already possess? The answer to this question depends on knowing all that is implied by guidance. The answer would, at the same time, remove all difficulties and confusions which arise in the minds of those who, not being familiar with the true signification of guidance, begin to suspect that certain verses of the Holy Qur'ān were contradicting certain others.

The Meaning of *Hidāyah* or Guidance

The best explanation of the word, *Hidāyah* (guidance) has been offered by Imām Raghib al-Isfaḥānī in his Mufradat al-Qur'ān, which can be summed up thus: *Hidayah* signifies leading someone towards his destination, gently and kindly; while guidance, in the real sense, issues forth from Allah alone, and it has several degrees.

The First Degree of Guidance

The first degree of guidance is general, and covers everything that exists in the universe -- minerals, plants, animals etc. It would surprise many to hear of guidance in relation to minerals. But the Holy Qur'ān makes it quite clear that all forms of existents in the universe, and every particle of dust possesses life, sensitivity, and even consciousness and understanding in its own degree and according to its own sphere of existence. Some of these existents possess more of this essence than others, and some less. Hence, those who have very little of it are considered to be inanimate and devoid of consciousness. The *Sharī'ah* too has recognized this difference, and such creatures have not been made to bear the obligation of observing the injunctions of Allah. The creatures which show obvious signs of life but not those of consiousness and reason are considered to be living, but not rational; whereas, creatures showing the signs of consciousness and reason, along with those of life, are called rational beings. Because of these differences in the degrees of consciousness, men and jinn alone, of all the existents in the universe, have been made subservient to the

injunctions of the *Shari'ah* and accountable for their actions, for they alone have the necessary consciousness and understanding. But, it does not mean that other creatures or existents are totally devoid of life or sensitivity, or of consciousness and understanding. The Holy Qur'ān is very explicit on this point:

وَاِنْ مِّنْ شَيْءٍ اِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهٖ وَلٰكِنْ لَّا تَفْقَهُوْنَ تَسْبِيْحَهُمْ

Nothing exists that does not celebrate His praise, but you do not understand their (mode of) praising. (17:44)

اَلَمْ تَرَ اَنَّ اللّٰهَ يُسَبِّحُ لَهٗ مَنْ فِى السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ وَالطَّيْرُ صٰٓفّٰتٍ كُلٌّ قَدْ عَلِمَ صَلَاتَهٗ وَتَسْبِيْحَهٗ وَاللّٰهُ عَلِيْمٌ بِمَا يَفْعَلُوْنَ ۝

Have you not seen that everything in the heavens and the earth proclaims Allah's purity, and the birds too that spread their wings? Each of them knows its prayer and its (mode of) praising. And Allah is aware of what they do. (24:41)

Evidently, one cannot extol and praise Allah without knowing Allah. It is equally evident that knowing Allah is the highest form of knowledge possible, and such a knowledge cannot be gained unless one possesses consciousness and understanding. These verses, therefore, show that everything that exists in the universe possesses life, sensitivity, understanding and consciousness, though it may not always be apparent to the ordinary observer -- a truth which has been endorsed by all the great religions, by certain ancient philosophers, and lately even by experimental science.

This, then, is the first degree of guidance which is common to minerals, plants, animals, men, jinns and all the forms of creation. The Holy Qur'ān speaks of this primary and general guidance in these words:

قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِىْٓ اَعْطٰى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهٗ ثُمَّ هَدٰى

He gave to everything its distinctive form, and then guided it. (20:50)

Or, as we find in another Sūrah:

سَبِّحِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْاَعْلَى ۝ الَّذِىْ خَلَقَ فَسَوّٰى ۝ وَالَّذِىْ قَدَّرَ فَهَدٰى ۝

Celebrate the name of your Lord, the Most High, Who has

created all things, well proportioned them, and Who has determined and guided them. (87:1-2)

That is to say, Allah has given every creature a particular nature and function, and guided it in a way which should correspond to its station in the scheme of things. Thanks to this general guidance, everything in the universe is performing its allotted function with such marvellous efficiency. For example, it is the ears that hear a sound and not the eyes or the nose. Similarly, the nose smells but cannot see; the eyes see but cannot smell. In short:

إِنْ كُلُّ مَنْ فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِلَّآ اٰتِي الرَّحْمٰنِ عَبْدًا ۝

There is nothing in the heavens and the earth but comes to the All-Merciful as a servant. (19:93)

The Second Degree of Guidance

Unlike the first, the second degree of guidance is not general but particular. It is limited to those creatures which are considered to be rational, that is, men and jinns. This kind of guidance comes to every man through prophets and revealed books. Some accept this guidance, and become believers (*Muslims*): some reject it and become disbelievers (*Kāfirs*).

The Third Degree of guidance

The third degree of guidance is still more particular, being special to true believers (*Mu'minīn*) and the God-fearing (*Muttaqīn*). Like the first degree, the third kind of guidance too descends directly to the individual from Allah, and it is called, *Tawfīq*. That is to say, Allah's grace provides a man with internal and external means and circumstances which should make it easy, and even pleasant for him to accept and act upon the guidance of the Holy Qur'ān, and difficult to ignore or oppose it. The scope of the third degree of guidance is limitless, and its levels indefinite.[5] Here is the sphere in which man, not only can, but is required to make a progress in the veritable sense of the term. The agency of this progress is the performance of virtuous

5. Contrary to all the modern fictions about man's Evolution or Perfectibility or Progress which may pass for sound philosophy or science.

deeds[6]. All increase in virtuous deeds brings with it an increase in divine guidance. The Holy Qur'ān itself gives us the promise of such increase:

وَالَّذِيْنَ اهْتَدَوْا زَادَهُمْ هُدًى

As for those who follow the straight path, Allah will increase their guidance. (47:17)

وَمَنْ يُّؤْمِنْ بِاللّٰهِ يَهْدِ قَلْبَهٗ

And whoever believes in Allah, He guides his heart. (64:11)

اَلَّذِيْنَ جَاهَدُوْا فِيْنَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا

Those who strive for (literally, 'in') Us, We will surely guide them in Our paths. (29:69)

It is in this field of progress that we see even the greatest prophets and men of Allah striving, and it is an increase in divine guidance and help that they keep seeking to their last breath.

A Cumulative view of guidance

Keeping in mind the three distinct degrees of guidance, one can easily see that guidance is a thing which everyone does possess in some way, and yet no one, not even the greatest, can do without wishing to attain more of its advanced and higher stages. Hence, of all the prayers man can address to Allah, the most important is the prayer for guidance, which has been taught to us in the very first Sūrah of the Holy Qur'ān; and this prayer is as necessary for the greatest of prophets and men of Allah as for an ordinary Muslim. That is why the Sūrah Al-Fatḥ (Victory), in enumerating the material and spiritual benefits of the conquest of Makkah in the last days of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, also says: وَيَهْدِيَكُمْ صِرَاطًا مُّسْتَقِيْمًا (and to guide you on the straight path) (48:20). When these verses were revealed, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had already received guidance and was a source of guidance for others. The good tidings of receiving guidance can, in this situation, have only one meaning that he attained some very high station of guidance at the time.

Guidance: Some notes of caution

In concluding this discussion about the different implications of

6. As defined, it goes without saying, by the *Sharī'ah* and not by individual or collective fancy, or by custom and habits, or by the fads or fashions of the day.

'guidance' (*Hidāyah*), we repeat points that would help the reader of the Holy Qur'an avoid certain confusions and errors:

1. The Holy Qur'ān sometimes speaks of divine guidance as being general and common to believers and non-believers, in fact to all creatures, and sometimes makes it out to be particular and special to the God-fearing. So, the unwary may be led to sense a contradiction here. But once it is understood that one degree of guidance is common to all, whereas another degree is limited to particular cases, the doubt and confusion readily resolves itself.

2. On the one hand, the Holy Qur'ān reminds us again and again that Allah does not grant guidance to the unjust and the unrighteous; on the other hand, it repeatedly declares that Allah guides all. The misunderstanding which may arise here is also dispelled by a knowledge of the degrees of guidance. Now we can easily see that the general guidance is given to all without any distinction, but the third and very special degree of guidance is not granted to the unjust and the unrighteous.

3. The first and the third degrees of guidance pertain to a direct act of divine grace, and no prophet can have anything to do with it, for the function of the prophets is related only to the second degree.

Whenever the Holy Qur'ān speaks of Prophets عليهم السلام as guides, it is always referring to this second degree, and to it alone. On the other hand, when the Holy Qur'ān, addressing the noble Prophet ﷺ, says: إِنَّكَ لَا تَهْدِي مَنْ أَحْبَبْتَ (You cannot guide whom you please) (28:56), it is the third degree of guidance which is intended, that is to say, it is neither the function of a prophet nor is it in his power to provide *tawfīq* to anyone, in other words, to make it easy for anyone to accept guidance. [7]

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7. Translator's Note: In this context one should not overlook the popularity enjoyed in the West, since the rise of Protestantism, by the notion of a personal relationship with God on the part of the individual. This notion has in its turn produced a diffused yet very effective conviction that ethics can be made independent of religion, that the external or legislative aspect of religion is of no account, that prescribed rites are irrelevant to the so-called 'religious experience', and more monstrously still, that doctrines can be dispensed with altogether -- all of which betrays a total incomprehension of what constitutes a religion. The tendency has, in fact, begun to infect some of the modernist interpreters of Islam in one way or another, all of whom claim to be fulfilling the 'needs of the present age'. Attempts have been made even to exploit this notion for ulterior motives.

Continued

To sum up, the Qur'ānic prayer اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيْمَ (guide us in the straight path) is most comprehensive, and certainly, one of the most important prayers taught to man. No member of the human family can claim not to need it. No success, no prosperity in this or in the other world can really come without being on the straight path. Particularly so, for man lost in the anxieties of mortal life, the prayer for the straight path is an elixir, though people do not realize it.

Which 'path' is 'straight'?

Now, to come to the meaning of the 'straight path', it is the path which has no turns and twists. The term signifies the particular way of Faith which equally avoids the two extremes of excess and deficiency. One who follows the straight path would, in matters of doctrine and practice both, neither go beyond the limits nor fall short of them.

The last two verses of the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah define and identify that 'straight path', something man has been prompted to pray for immediately earlier. The verse says: صِرَاطَ الَّذِيْنَ اَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ (The path of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace). As to who these people are, another verse of the Holy Qur'ān gives us details in the following words:

اَلَّذِيْنَ اَنْعَمَ اللّٰهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِّنَ النَّبِيّٖنَ وَالصِّدِّيْقِيْنَ وَالشُّهَدَآءِ وَالصّٰلِحِيْنَ

Those whom Allah has blessed, namely, the prophets, the *Siddiqin*, the *Shuhadā'*, and the righteous. (4:69)

Continued In persuading the Muslim countries to look upon themselves as 'the eastern-most part of the West', the London ECONOMIST argues that Islam 'also implies a one-to-one relationship between the believer and the God he believes in, a direct contact without intermediary and in this relationship, in which a single God speaks directly to the core of a single man, is the basis of individualism. The Protestant ethic is grounded on precisely the same concept.' (May 17-23, 1975, page 82 of the Special Survey).

In the light of the discussion regarding the three degrees of guidance, it should not be difficult to see that the direct contact with God without intermediary pertains only to the first and third degrees, and not the second degree where the mediation of the prophets is indispensable. To attain the third degree may be necessary for making a spiritual progress, but Islam, or for that matter any authentic religion, is born out of the second degree of guidance. One cannot, indeed, enjoy the benefits of the third degree without having accepted the guidance of the second degree -- or, to use the Islamic terminology, without following the *Sharī'ah*.

These are the four categories of those who find favour with Allah. Among them all, the prophets are the greatest. The *Siddiqīn* (the constantly true) are those who acquire spiritual perfection, and thus -- attain the highest rank among the followers of a prophet. In common parlance, they are called Men of Allah, or saints.[8] The *Shuhadā'* (martyrs) are those who sacrifice even their lives for the sake of their faith (or, who bear witness to the truth, as the word admits of both meanings). The righteous (the *Salihīn*) are those who follow the *Sharī'ah* completely, not only in the matter of obligations (*Wājibat*) but also with regard to commendable (*mustaḥabb*) actions. In everyday language they are called the pious or the virtuous or the good.

This verse, then, determines the straight path in a positive manner, identifying it with the path followed by men of these four categories. The next verse, by a process of elimination, does the same in a negative manner by saying:

غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ۝

Not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.

Those who have incurred Allah's wrath are the people, who inspite of being quite familiar with the commandments of Allah wilfully go against them out of a calculated perversity or in the service of their desires, or, in other words, who are deficient in obeying divine injunctions. This, for example, was the general condition of the Jews who were ready to sacrifice their religion for the sake of a petty worldly gain, and used to insult and sometimes even to kill their prophets.

As for الضَّالِّينَ (those who go astray), they are the people who, out of ignorance or lack of thought, go beyond the limits appointed by Allah, and indulge in excess and exaggeration in religious matters. This, for example, has generally been the error of the Christians who exceeded the limits in their reverence for a prophet and turned him into a god. On the one hand, there is the rebelliousness of the Jews who not only refused to listen to the prophets of Allah but went on to kill them; on the other hand, there is the excessive zeal of the Christians who deified a prophet.

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8. If taken in an untainted religious sense, and certainly not if taken in one of the many modern vulgarized usages of the term where, for instance, you see the halo of spiritual glory over the head of a spy!

Thus, the essential meaning of the verse is that, in praying for the straight path, we do not ask for the path of those who are the slaves of their desires, perverse in thought and action, and deficient in performing their religious obligations, nor the path of those who are ignorant or unmindful or misled, and indulge in excess and exaggeration in religious matters, but wish for a path between these two extremes, which inclines neither towards excess nor towards deficiency, and which is as free of the promptings of desires as of doubts and confusions and of erroneous beliefs.

In short, the prayer for the straight path is the essence of the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah. Since knowing and following the straight path is the real knowledge and the real achievement in this mortal world, a mistake in picking it up right takes peoples and nations to ruins; otherwise, there are even non-Muslims who claim to be seeking God and undertake stupendous labours to attain this end. The Holy Qur'ān has, therefore, defined the straight path so explicitly from a positive as well as eliminative point of view.

The Key to the Straight Path

But, before we proceed, there is another problem to be considered, the answer to which would open the door to a new and more comprehensive understanding. It would seem that in order to define the straight path it should have been sufficient to call it 'the path of the Prophet' صلى الله عليه وسلم or 'the path of the Qur'ān', which should also have been more succinct and more explicit, for the whole of the Holy Qur'ān is really an explanation of the straight path, and the teachings of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم , an elaboration. But, setting aside the succinct and explicit form of expression, the Holy Qur'ān has taken up two verses of this short Sūrah for defining and delimiting the straight path positively and negatively, and has thus indicated that if one wishes to follow the straight path, one should seek such and such men 'those on whom Allah has bestowed His grace...', and adopt their way. Here, the Holy Qur'ān does not ask us to follow the 'path of the Qur'ān', for a book alone is not sufficient for the grooming of man; nor does it ask us to follow 'the path of the prophet', for the Holy Prophet ﷺ was not to be in this world for ever, and no other prophet was to come after him. So, in enumerating those whose teaching and example can help us attain the straight path, the Holy Qur'ān has, besides the prophets صلى الله عليه وسلم , included those too, who will always be found living amongst us till the last day of the world -- namely, the

Siddiqīn, the *Shuhadā'*, and the righteous.

For the purpose of indicating the manner in which one can find the straight path, the Holy Qur'ān has thus referred not to a book but to certain men. According to a *ḥadīth*, when the Holy Prophet ﷺ informed his Companions that, like earlier communities, his *'Ummah'* too would be divided into seventy or seventy-two sects, and that only one among them would be on the right path, they wanted to know as to which group it would be. The answer he gave also leads on to certain men of Allah, for he said: مَا اَنَا عَلَيْهِ وَاَصْحَابِيْ (That which follows my way and the way of my Companions). All this comes to mean that written books or oral traditions alone cannot teach, train and discipline man; for this, one has to be with knowing men, and learning from them. In yet other words, the real teacher and groomer of man has to be another man; a book cannot take that place all by itself. How curtly this was pointed out by Akbar, the famous Urdu poet-humourist, who said:

کورس تو لفظ ہی سکھاتے ہیں
آدمی، آدمی بناتے ہیں

which, in English, comes close to saying: "Courses teach words. But, men train men." This truth holds good even for spheres of everyday life.

No one has ever become a doctor, or an engineer, or even a cook or a tailor merely by reading a book. Similarly, studying the Holy Qur'ān and the *Ḥadīth* on one's own cannot by itself be sufficient for the moral-spiritual education and training of a man; such a study must be carried on under the guidance of a specialist or a genuine scholar before it can be useful. It is common observation that,[9] many people today, though otherwise educated, cherish the erroneous notion that one can acquire a masterly knowledge of the Holy Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* merely by reading a translation or at best a commentary.[10] But the error of such an enterprise is self-evident. Had a book in itself been sufficient for the guidance of men, there was no need for the prophets to be sent. But, Allah in sending us His Book, has also sent His Prophet to serve as a teacher and guide. In defining the straight path

9. Under the influence of the West, particularly that of Protestantism.

10. The illusion has been encouraged by the modernistic or pseudo-modernistic interpretations of Islam.

too, He has also enumerated those of His servants who find special favour with Him -- all of which argues that, in trying to understand the Book of Allah and to act upon it, one cannot solely rely on one's own study and judgment, but must turn to someone who knows.

The conclusion

Two things are necessary for the physical and spiritual well-being and success of man -- the Book of Allah which contains guidance for every sphere of human life, and the Men of Allah who help in making this guidance effective. The way to profit from the Men of Allah is to assess them according to the well-known principles of the Book of Allah. Those who do not conform to these principles should just not be regarded as Men of Allah. But, when one has found Men of Allah, in the real sense, one should seek their guidance in order to understand the meaning of the Book of Allah and act upon it.

Why the Schism?

As to the sectarian differences on this point, we may remark that there are two kinds of deviations in this respect. Some people elected to follow the Book of Allah alone, ignored the Men of Allah totally and gave no value to their teachings and explanations. Conversely, others adopted the Men of Allah as the only criterion of truth and became indifferent to the Book of Allah. Both these ways lead to fatal error.

Injunctions and related considerations

To recapitulate, the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah begins with the praise of Allah. Then comes an affirmation on the part of man that he worships Allāh alone, and turns to him alone in the hour of need. That is, so to say, the oath of allegiance man offers to his Lord and Master. Finally, there is a prayer which covers all possible human needs and goals. Beside these, there are some related secondary considerations also which arise from the Sūrah. These are as follows:

The proper way of Praying to Allah

Through this particular mode of expression and through its structure, the Sūrah teaches man how to pray and how to make a request to Allah. The proper method is that one should begin by fulfilling one's obligation to praise Allah. Then, one should offer the pledge of complete allegiance to Allah to the effect that one does not regard anyone except Allah as being worthy of adoration and worship,

nor does one look upon anyone except Allah as having the real power to give help in one's distress or need. Finally, one should pray for what one wishes to have. And there is every hope that a prayer made in this manner will be granted. (See Ahkam al-Jassās). The Sūrah also suggests that, in praying to Allah, one should pray for something so comprehensive that it includes in essence all possible human goals, for example, pray for being guided in the straight path, because if one can and does follow the straight path in everything that concerns this world or the other, one's material life or spiritual, one need not be afraid of stumbling or of being hurt.

Praising Allah is Man's Natural Demand

The first verse of the Surah teaches man to praise Allah. We praise someone either for a quality inherent in him or for a favour received from him. But the verse mentions neither. The implication is that the blessings of Allah are limitless. The Holy Qur'ān says: وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ لَا تُحْصُوهَا (If you try to count the blessings of Allah, you will never be able to number them) (14:34 and 16:18). Leaving aside other things, if man only considers his own being, he would find that it is a microcosm -- in itself which contains in analogical form everything contained in the macrocosm, his body offers a parallel to the earth, the hair on it to the vegetation, his bones to the hills, his veins flowing with blood to the springs underground.[11]

Man, again, is composed of two parts, spirit and body, of which the spirit is obviously superior in value, while the body is subservient to it. In this inferior part alone, there are thousands of anatomical and biological wonders. There are supposed to be more than three hundred joints, but Allah has made each of them so strong that during the sixty or seventy years of an average man's life they are in perpetual motion and yet do not need repairs. Of this Allah himself has reminded us:

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11. It may not be out of place to remark that this analogical view of man's relationship with the universe has been an essential feature of all traditional cosmologies. The Copernican cosmology, whatever its merits may otherwise be, has tended to dissolve this vision of things, leaving man, at least in the West, to grow more and more alienated from the universe -- till we have arrived at the viewers of the American television who are reported to have been more interested in a ball game than in man's first landing on the moon -- Translator

نَحْنُ خَلَقْنٰهُمْ وَ شَدَدْنَا أَسْرَهُمْ

It is We Who created them, and it is We Who endowed their joints with strength (76:28).

Or, take the example of the eye. One may spend a life-time and yet not fully know the manifestations of divine wisdom present in it. Or, take a single movement of the eye, and see how many blessings of Allah are involved in its functioning. Before the eye can see, internally it requires physical energy which in its turn is provided by food, air, water etc. And externally it requires the light of the sun which in its turn depends on a thousand other factors. That is to say, all the forces of the universe join together to make it possible for the eye to see even once. Now, try to calculate how many times does the eye see in a day, in a year, in a man's life-time. Similarly, the functions of the ears, the tongue, the hands and the feet, each brings into action the forces of the whole universe.

This is a kind of blessing which is equally available to every living man, be he a king or a beggar. In fact, all the greatest blessings of Allah are the common property of every living creature -- for example, air, water, light, the sun, the moon, the stars, in fact, everything that exists in the heavens and the earth, or between them, offers its benefits to all without distinction.

Then there are special blessings which divine wisdom has chosen to distribute unequally among men, some getting more and others less. This category includes wealth, honour, health, peace, knowledge and other acquisitions. Although the general blessings are obviously much more important and essential for human life than the special blessings, yet man in his naivete takes them for granted and never realizes what great gifts they are in spite of being common.

Now, human nature itself requires that in recognition of the innumerable blessings that keep descending on him at every moment of his life, man should, as far as he can, praise and continue to praise his Benefactor. It is to indicate this basic need of human nature that the Holy Qur'ān employs the word اَلْحَمْدُ : *'Al-ḥamd'* (Praise) as the first word of the very first Sūrah. Thus, the praise of Allah has been accorded a very high rank among the acts of worship. The Holy Prophet ﷺ has

said that when, on receiving some kind of a blessing from Allah, His servant says اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ: (Praise belongs to Allah), it is like giving something better in return for what he has taken (Qurṭubī, from Ibn Majah, as narrated by Anas رضى الله عنه). According to another *ḥadīth* if a man, on receiving all possible blessings of the world, says: اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ (*Al-ḥamdulillāh*), his act is superior to all those blessings. Commenting on this *ḥadīth* and citing certain scholars, al-Qurṭubī says, the ability to repeat the phrase '*Al-ḥamdulillāh*' with one's tongue is in itself a blessing of Allah. According to another authentic *ḥadīth*, saying this phrase fills half the scale on the side of good deeds in the Balance. As to what praising Allah should actually mean, Shaqiq ibn Ibrāhīm explains that when one receives some gift from Allah, one should first of all recognize the Benefactor, then be content with what He has given, and finally never disobey Him as long as one has some strength left in the body, which again is a gift from Allah. (See Qurṭubī)

The second element in the phrase is *Lillah*, which is composed of the preposition *Lām* (Arabic equivalent of the letter L) and the noun 'Allah'. This preposition means 'for' and is used for particularization, showing the exclusive possession of a thing or quality. So, the phrase implies that not only is it the duty of man to praise Allah, but in reality all praise belongs exclusively to Him, and no one else in the universe is worthy of it. At the same time, and by way of a further blessing, Allah has, for the purpose of teaching man how to behave with his fellow beings, commanded him to thank those too through whom the gifts of Allah come to him, for one who does not see the need of thanking his human benefactor would not thank Allah too.

Self-Praise is not permitted

It is not permissible for a created being such as man to praise himself. The Holy Qur'ān says: فَلَا تُزَكُّوْا اَنْفُسَكُمْ هُوَ اَعْلَمُ بِمَنِ اتَّقٰى Do not pretend to be pure; He knows best who is really God-fearing) (53:32). That is to say, a man can be praised only if he fears Allah, but Allah alone knows to what degree a particular man possesses this quality, known as *Taqwā*. As for Allah praising Himself, the reason is that man is not capable of praising the glory and greatness of Allah in a befitting manner. Not to speak of others, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has

exclaimed: لَا أُحْصِيْ ثَنَاءً عَلَيْكَ (I cannot properly praise You!). Therefore, Allah Himself has taught man the mode of praising Him.

***Rabb* is the exclusive attribute of Allah**

The Arabic word *'Rabb'* (Lord) is applied to a person who not only possesses a certain thing, but is also fully capable of and responsible for nurturing it properly. Obviously, no one can act as *'Rabb'* with regard to the whole universe except Allah. So, the word, used in an absolute sense, is exclusive to Allah, and it is not permissible to address or describe anyone other than Allah as *'Rabb.'* A *ḥādīth* in the Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim explicitly forbids a slave or servant to call his master a *'Rabb'*. The word may, however, be employed in the case of a man too in a relative sense -- that is, in relation to a particular thing, for example, *'rabb al-dar'* (master of the house) etc. (Qurṭubī).

Seeking help from Allah

According to the great commentator and Companion 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, the verse إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِيْنُ : 'You alone we worship, and from You alone we seek help' means that one worships Allah alone and no one else, and that one turns for help to Allah alone and to no one else. (Ibn Abī Ḥatīm, Ibn Jarīr)

It has been reported from certain great scholars and saints of the earliest centuries of Islam that the Sūrah al-Fātiḥah is the secret (i.e., the gist) of the entire Holy Qur'ān, and this verse is the secret of the whole Sūrah, for the first sentence of the verse is a declaration of one's being free from *Shirk*, or from all desire to associate anyone with Allah, and the second sentence is an expression of one's being exempt from all wish to trust in one's own power and will. Such an affirmation would naturally lead to putting oneself in the hands of Allah in all concerns. The Holy Qur'ān again and again commands us to do so: فَاعْبُدْهُ وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَيْهِ :'Worship Him, and put your trust in Him'. (11:123); قل هو الرحمن آمَنَّا بِهِ وَعَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْنَا :'Say He is the All-Merciful. We believe in Him, and we put all our trust in Him' (67:29); رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ لَا إِلٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَاتَّخِذْهُ وَكِيْلًا :'He is the Lord of the East and the West; there is no god but He; so take Him for a guardian' (73:9). All these verses come to mean simply this -- a true Muslim should, in anything that he undertakes, rely neither on his own faculties nor on the help of a fellow creature, but should entrust himself completely to Allah, for He alone is All-Powerful, and He alone is the absolute helper.

Two doctrinal points emerge from this discussion. Firstly, it is totally forbidden to worship anyone except Allah, and associating anyone else with Him in worship is a deadly and unforgiveable sin. As we have already explained, *'Ibādah* (worship) signifies an utmost humility and willing self-abasement before someone out of the deepest love and veneration. If one behaves in this manner in relation to any created being, it is called *shirk* (association) in Islamic terminology. It basically follows from this definition of "worship" that "association" does not merely consist in attributing divine power to figures made out of stone or metal as idolators usually do; but obeying or loving or venerating someone to the degree which is reserved for Allah is also an "obvious association" (*al-shirk al-Jalii*). In recounting how the Jews and the Christians indulge in *shirk* (association), the Holy Qur'ān says: اِتَّخَذُوْٓا اَحْبَارَهُمْ وَرُهْبَانَهُمْ اَرْبَابًا مِّنْ دُوْنِ اللّٰهِ : 'They have taken their religious scholars and their monks as lords apart from Allah'. (9:31)

The Companion 'Adī Ibn Ḥatīm, who was a Christian before accepting Islam, asked the Holy Prophet ﷺ with reference to this verse as to why the Holy Qur'ān should blame the Christians for having taken their religious scholars as lords when they were never guilty of worshipping them. The Holy Prophet ﷺ in his turn asked him if it was not a fact that their scholars had declared many things as forbidden although Allah had permitted men to eat them, and that conversely they had declared as permissible what had been forbidden, and that the Christians obeyed their scholars in both the respects. 'Adī admitted that it was so. Therefore, the Holy Prophet ﷺ remarked that this was exactly how they 'worshipped' their scholars. This goes to prove that Allah alone has the right to establish what is permissible and what is forbidden. If one associates somebody else with Allah in this respect and, in spite of being familiar with the divine injunctions regarding what is permissible (*ḥalāl*) and what is forbidden (*haram*), goes against them, believing that someone other than Allah too can demand obedience in these matters, one is virtually worshipping him and being guilty of the sin of association (*shirk*). But, in order to guard against a possible misunderstanding, we may remark that this verse of the Holy Qur'ān, which condemns the worship of religious scholars, does in no way apply to the generality of Muslims who, not being

qualified to understand the Holy Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* by themselves or to deduce the injunctions of the *Sharī'ah* from them, naturally depend on an *Imām*, a *Mujtāhid*, a *Mufti* or a religious scholar and follow his instructions in these matters. In fact, such Muslims are only acting in accordance with the Holy Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*, and obeying divine commandments. For the Holy Qur'ān itself says:

فَاسْئَلُوْا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ ۝

Ask the men of knowledge, if you yourselves do not know. (16:43)

Another thing which comes under the category of association (*shirk*) is to make votive offerings to someone other than Allah; so does praying to someone else in time of need or distress, for, according to a Tradition (*Ḥadīth*), praying is also an act of worship. Similarly, adopting such practices as are in general considered to be the signs or symbols of association also constitute the same sin. For example, the Companion 'Adī ibn Ḥatīm رضی الله عنه relates that when he embraced Islam and presented himself before the Holy Prophet ﷺ with a cross hanging round his neck, the Holy Prophet ﷺ asked him to remove this idol. Although at this time the cross did not have the kind of signification for 'Adī which it has for Christians, yet he was asked to shun a symbol of 'association' externally as well. Among the symbols of 'association' are included practices like bowing (*rukū'*) or prostrating (*sajdah*) oneself before anyone except Allah, or going round a person or thing in the prescribed manner of the *tawāf* (circumambulation) of the *Ka'bāh*. Avoiding all such symbols of 'association' is a necessary part of the pledge of fidelity to Allah made in the phrase: 'You alone we worship'.

Seeking Allah's Help Directly and Indirectly

The other doctrinal point we mentioned is that one must turn to Allah alone for help and to no one else. This requires some clarification.

There is a kind of help which every man does seek from other men. The physical aspect of the universal order being what it is, it has to be so, and not otherwise. A tailor or tinker, a carpenter or a blacksmith, each is serving others, and everyone is obliged to seek his help. Seeking help of this kind neither is nor can be forbidden by any

religion, for it is part and parcel of the network of physical means provided to men by Allah. In the sphere of non-physical means too, it is quite permissible for one to seek the help of a prophet or a saint by asking him to pray to Allah in one's behalf, or to mention, while praying directly to Allah, the name of a prophet or a saint by way of a medium (*wasilāh*) for drawing divine mercy upon oneself. Explicit Traditions (*aḥādīth*) and implicit indications of the Holy Qur'ān fully justify this practice, and it would be wrong to condemn it as being forbidden or to include it among the various forms of association (*shirk*).

Now, what sort of supplication for help is it which can be addressed exclusively to Allah and to no one else? And, when does one fall into the sin of *shirk* (association) in asking someone other than Allah for help? In reply to the second question, we may say that in this context the sin of *shirk* or association arises in two forms. Firstly, one becomes guilty of association, if one seeks the help of an angel or prophet or saint or any creature believing him to be omnipotent like Allah. It is such an obvious heresy that even idolaters and associators in general consider it as such, for even they do not look upon their idols and gods as being omnipotent like Allah. The second is the form adopted by idolaters and associators. They admit that God alone is Omnipotent, but also believe that He has delegated a part of His power to an angel or a prophet or a saint or to a smaller god who exercises a full and independent authority in that area, and to whom one may pray for help in matters within his jurisdiction. This is the supplication which the Holy Qur'ān forbids, and against which it warns us in the phrase إِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ (to You alone we pray for help).

There is a simple reason for misunderstanding in this regard. Allah appoints many angels to perform quite a large number of functions even in the physical order of the universe; or, He makes many things happen through the prophets which are beyond the powers of man and which are called miracles (*mu'jizat*), as also other incredible wonders through the saints which are called *karāmat*. The appearance may easily lead a careless observer to ignore the reality, and to conclude from what he has seen that the angels or the prophets or the saints could not have worked such wonders if Allah had not

given them the necessary power and authority. This faulty argument which is no more than an illusion gives birth to the belief that the prophets or the saints enjoy absolute power and authority in their own degree. It is not so. Miracles and wonders are the direct acts of Allah, but they are manifested through prophets and saints so that people may recognize their spiritual station -- prophets and saints themselves have no powers to make such things happen. This fact is borne out by so many verses of the Holy Qur'ān. For example, the verse: وَمَا رَمَيْتَ إِذْ رَمَيْتَ وَلٰكِنَّ اللّٰهَ رَمٰى : 'When you threw, it was not you that threw, but Allah threw' (8:17) refers to a miracle of the Holy Prophet ﷺ in which he threw a handful of pebbles at an army of his enemies, and Allah willed it so that they smote the eyes of the whole army. The Holy Qur'ān attributes the act of throwing pebbles, not to the Holy Prophet ﷺ but to Allah Himself, which clearly shows that a miracle is manifested through a prophet ﷺ , but is in reality an act of Allah Himself. Similarly, when the people of Nūḥ, or Noah, عليه السلام demanded that, in order to establish his authenticity as a prophet, he should bring down on them the punishment and wrath of Allah, he replied: إِنَّمَا يَأْتِيكُمْ بِهِ اللّٰهُ إِنْ شَآءَ :'Allah will certainly bring it down to you, if He so wills' (11:33), in other words, he declared that he himself could not bring down divine punishment on them by way of a miracle. Another verse of the Holy Qur'ān reports what a group of prophets said to their people in reply to a similar demand: مَا كَانَ لَنَا أَنْ نَّأْتِيَكُمْ بِسُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللّٰهِ :'We cannot give you proof, except by Allah's will' (14:11). This again was an admission that it was not in their power to produce a miracle, for all power rests in the hands of Allah. In short, it is not at all possible for a prophet or a saint to show a miracle whenever he likes and whatsoever he likes. The disbelievers used to demand specific miracles from the Holy Prophet ﷺ and from the earlier prophets عليهم السلام but Allah manifested only those which He Himself pleased, and not others. The Holy Qur'ān presents many such instances.

An ordinary example will make the discussion clear. In your room, you receive light from a lamp and air from a fan, but the lamp and the fan do not possess in themselves an absolute power to give you light and air, but need the electric current which they receive from the power house, and without which they cannot function. Giving you light

and air is, in actual fact, not the work of the lamp and the fan, but of the electric current which comes from the power house. Similarly, saints, prophets and angels, all depend on Allah in everything they do; it is Allah's power and will which makes things happen, though it manifests itself through prophets and saints as the electric current manifests itself through fans and lamps.

This example would also show that although prophets and saints have no power to make these things happen or come to be, yet their presence is not altogether irrevelant to what happens, you cannot have light and air in your room without there being a lamp and a fan. Likewise, you cannot have miracles or wonders without there being a prophet or a saint. There is, of course, a certain difference between the two situations. In spite of all the wirings and fittings being intact, you cannot have light without a lamp, nor air without a fan. But, in the case of miracles, Allah has the power, if He so wills, to manifest them even without the medium of prophets and saints. The usual way of Allah has, however, been that miracles are not manifested without the medium of prophets and saints; otherwise miracles would not serve the purpose for which they are intended.

To conclude, one must have firm faith in the doctrine that everything that happens is made to happen by the power and will of Allah, but it is also necessary to recognize the need for prophets and saints, and to admit their importance. Without such an admission, one would succeed neither in obeying divine commandments in the real sense nor in attaining Allah's pleasure exactly like the man who, being ignorant of the worth of lamps and fans, disregards them, and remains deprived of light and air.

The problems we have discussed above perplex many a mind. But the answer is essentially simple. Taking prophets and saints as a medium (*wasilāh*) for drawing divine mercy upon oneself is neither absolutely permissible nor absolutely forbidden. There is a condition attached to it. If one does so, believing a prophet or a saint to be all-powerful, it becomes an act of *shirk* (association) and is hence forbidden. But if one takes a prophet or a saint to be no more than a medium.or a means, it is permissible. But one finds that in this matter people generally adopt either of the two extreme positions, outright

rejection of *wasilāh* or exaggerated veneration. The truth, however, lies between the two.

6. Success in this world and in the Hereafter

As we have said before, the prayer which the Holy Qur'ān has chosen to recommend to everyone, in every situation and for everything one does, is the prayer for being guided in the straight path. Just as success in the Hereafter depends on taking the straight path which leads one to Paradise, in the same way, if you come to think about it, success in all worldly concerns too depends on keeping to the straight path -- that is, on using the means and methods which habitually lead to the attainment of one's goal. Conversely, a little reflection will reveal that failure is always due to having strayed from the straight path. In view of the need for the straight path in worldly and other worldly concerns both, this is the prayer which should constantly be on the lips and in the heart of a true Muslim -- never as an empty verbal exercise, but with a sincere intention and with the meaning of the words fully present in the mind.

With Allah's help, the commentary on Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah ends here.

SŪRAH AL-BAQARAH

(The Cow)

MADINITE	بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ	286 VERSES

The name and the number of verses

According to the *aḥadīth* of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the reports relating to his blessed Companions, the name of this Sūrah is Al-Baqarah. The *riwayah* or narration which prohibits this name is not authentic (Ibn Kathir). It comprises of 286 verses, 6201 words and 25500 letters (Ibn Kathir).

The period of revelation

The Sūrah is Madinite - that is to say, it was revealed at Madīnah after the Hijrah; some of the verses included here were revealed at Makkah at the time of the last Hajj of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, but, in accordance with the terminology of the commentators, they too are regarded as Madinite. This is the longest Sūrah in the Holy Qur'ān. It was the first Sūrah to be revealed at Madīnah, but different verses were revealed at different times, covering quite a long period so much so that the verses with regard to *riba* (interest or usury) were revealed in the last days of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم after the conquest of Makkah. Actually, the verse:

وَاتَّقُوْا يَوْمًا تُرْجَعُوْنَ فِيْهِ اِلَى اللّٰهِ

Fear the day when you will return to Allah (2:281),

is the very last verse of the Holy Qur'ān to be revealed - this happened on the 10th of Dhu al-Hijjah 10 A.H., when the Holy Prophet ﷺ was

in the course of performing his last Hajj, and only eighty or ninety days later he departed from this world, and the process of Divine Revelation came to an end for ever. (Qurtubi)

The merits of Sūrah Al-Baqarah

It is not only the longest Sūrah in the Holy Qur'ān, but also contains quite a large number of injunctions. The Holy Prophet ﷺ has said: "Make a habit of reading the Sūrah Al-Baqarah, for reading it brings down on you the *barakah* or blessings of Allah, and neglecting it is a matter of regret, and a misfortune. And men of falsehood cannot overcome it". Al-Qurṭubī cites the blessed Companion Mu'awiyah to the effect that the men of falsehood referred to here are sorcerers, and the implication is that one who keeps reading this Surah becomes immune to the effect of black magic (Qurṭubī, from Muslim, as narrated by Abū Umamah Bahili). The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has also said that Satan flees from the house in which this Surah is read or recited. (Ibn Kathir from Hakim). Another *ḥadith* says that this Sūrah is the apex of the Holy Qur'ān, and that a retinue of eighty angels had accompanied each of its verses when it was revealed (Ibn Kathīr from Musnad Ahmad). The blessed Companion Abū Hurairaرضى الله عنه reports from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that there is a verse in this Sūrah which enjoys a superiority over all the other verses of the Holy Qur'ān, and that verse is the Verse of the *Kursi* (*Āyaṭ al-Kursī* 2:255) (Ibn Kathīr from Tirmidhī). The blessed Companion Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd says that ten verses of this Sūrah have such an efficacy that if one recites them at night, neither Satan nor *jinn* would enter one's house, nor would one and one's family be afflicted with illness or calamity or sorrow that night, and that if they are recited over a man suffering from a fit of madness, his condition will improve. The ten verses are these: the first four verses of the Sūrah, three verses in the middle (that is, the *Āyaṭ al-Kursī*, and the two following verses), and the last three verses of the Sūrah.

This Sūrah enjoys, with regard to its contents as well, a special distinction. Ibn al-'Arabī reports from his elders that in this Sūrah there are one thousand injunctions, one thousand prohibitions, one thousand subtle points of wisdom, and one thousand parables and references to historical events (Qurṭubī and Ibn Kathīr). That is why the

great Caliph 'Umar رضی اللہ عنہ spent twelve years in learning and meditating over this Sūrah, and the blessed Companion Abdullāh ibn 'Umar spent eight years to learn it. (Qurṭubī)

As we have said, the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah is the gist and the essence of the Holy Qur'ān. It deals with three basic themes - firstly, the affirmation of Allah as the Lord (*Rabb*) of the universe; secondly, the affirmation that Allah alone, and none else, is worthy of being worshipped; thirdly, the prayer for guidance. Thus, the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah ends with the request for the straight path, and the whole of the Qur'ān is, in fact, an answer to this request - that is to say, the man who seeks the straight path will find it only in the Holy Qur'ān.

Hence it is that the Sūrah Al-Fātihah is immediately followed by the Sūrah Al-Baqarah which begins with the words, "That is the Book", indicating that this book is the straight path one has been seeking and praying for. Having defined the nature and function of the Holy Qur'ān, the Sūrah proceeds to state in a very brief manner the basic principles of the Islamic faith - namely, oneness of God, prophethood and hereafter (*Tawḥīd, Risālah, Ākhirah*). These principles have been presented in detail at the end of the Surah. In between, the Sūrah lays down the basic principles, and sometime even secondary rules in detail, for providing guidance to man in all spheres of life, modes of *'ibādah* (worship), ethics, individual and social behaviour, economic relationships, ways and means of improving oneself externally and internally.

Verses 1 - 5

الٓمّٓ ۝ ذٰلِكَ الْكِتٰبُ لَا رَيْبَ ۛ فِيْهِ ۛ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِيْنَ ۝ الَّذِيْنَ
يُؤْمِنُوْنَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَ يُقِيْمُوْنَ الصَّلٰوةَ وَ مِمَّا رَزَقْنٰهُمْ يُنْفِقُوْنَ ۝
وَالَّذِيْنَ يُؤْمِنُوْنَ بِمَآ اُنْزِلَ اِلَيْكَ وَمَآ اُنْزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ وَبِالْاٰخِرَةِ
هُمْ يُوْقِنُوْنَ ۝ اُولٰٓئِكَ عَلٰى هُدًى مِّنْ رَّبِّهِمْ وَ اُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ
الْمُفْلِحُوْنَ ۝

With the name of Allah,
The All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful.

Alif. Lam. Mim. That Book has no doubt in it - a

guidance for the God-fearing, who believe in the unseen, and are steadfast in *salah*, and spend out of what We have provided them; and who believe in what has been revealed to you and what has been revealed before you, and do have faith in the Hereafter. It is these who are on guidance given by their Lord; and it is just these who are successful. (Verses 1-5)

The Sūrah begins with the Arabic letters *Alif*, *Lām* and *Mīm* (equivalents of A, L and M). Several Sūrahs begin with a similar combination of letters, for example, *Ḥā, Mīm,* or *Alif, Lām, Mīm, Ṣād.* Each of these letters is pronounced separately without the addition of a vowel sound after it. So, the technical term for them is مُقَطَّعَاتْ (*Muqatta'āt*: isolated letters).

According to certain commentators, the isolated letters are the names of the Surahs at the beginning of which they occur. According to others, they are the symbols of the Divine Names. But the majority of the blessed Companions and the generation next to them, the *Tabi'īn*, and also the later authoritative scholars have preferred the view that the isolated letters are symbols or mysteries, the meaning of which is known to Allah alone or may have been entrusted as a special secret to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم not to be communicated to anyone else. That is why no commentary or explanation of these letters has at all been reported from him. The great commentator Al-Qurṭubī has adopted this view of the matter, which is summarized below:

"According to 'Amir Āl-Sha'bī, Sufyān Al-Thawrī and many masters of the science of *Ḥadīth*, every revealed book contains certain secret signs and symbols and mysteries of Allah; the isolated letters too are the secrets of Allah in the Holy Qur'ān, and hence they are among the مُتَشَابِهَاتْ (*Mutashābihāt*: of hidden meaning), the meaning of which is known to Allah alone, and it is not permissible for us even to enter into any discussion with regard to them. The isolated letters are not, however, without some benefit to us. Firstly, to believe in them and to recite them is in itself a great merit. Secondly, in reciting them we receive spiritual blessings from the unseen world, even if we are not aware of the fact. Al-Qurṭubī adds: "The Blessed Caliphs Abū

Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Ali, and most of the Companions like 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd رضی اللہ تعالی عنہ, firmly held the view that these letters are the secrets of Allah, that we should believe in them as having descended from Allah and recite them exactly in the form in which they have descended, but should not be inquisitive about their meanings, which would be improper". Citing Al-Qurṭubī and others, Ibn Kathīr too prefers this view. On the other hand, interpretations of the isolated letters have been reported from great and authentic scholars. Their purpose, however, was only to provide symbolical interpretation, or to awaken the minds of the readers to the indefinite possibilities of meanings that lie hidden in the Holy Qur'ān, or just to simplify things; they never wished to claim that these were the meanings intended by Allah Himself. Therefore, it would not be justifiable to challenge such efforts at interpretation since it would go against the considered judgment of veritable scholars.

The sentence "That Book has no doubt in it" raises a grammatical and exegetical problem, for the first phrase in the Arabic text reads as "ذٰلِكَ الْكِتٰبُ" :*Dhālikal kitāb*. Now, the word *dhālika* (that) is used to point out a distant thing, while the word *kitāb* (book) obviously refers to the Holy Qur'ān itself, which is present before us. So, this particular demonstrative pronoun does not seem to be appropriate to the situation. There is, however, a subtle indication. The pronoun refers back to the prayer for the straight path made in the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah, implying that the prayer has been granted and the Holy Qur'ān is the answer to the request, which gives a detailed account of the straight path to those who seek guidance and are willing to follow it.

Having indicated this, the Holy Qur'ān makes a claim about itself: "There is no doubt in it". There are two ways in which doubt or suspicion may arise with regard to the validity or authenticity of statement. Either the statement itself is erroneous, and thus becomes subject to doubt; or, the listener makes a mistake in understanding it. In the latter case, the statement does not really become subject to doubt, even if someone comes to suspect it out of a defective or distorted understanding - as the Holy Qur'ān itself reminds us later in

the same Sūrah: إِنْ كُنتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ :"If you are in doubt..." (2:23). So, in spite of the doubts and objections of a thousand men of small or perverse understanding, it would still be true to say that there is no doubt in this book - either with regard to it having been revealed by Allah, or with regard to its contents.

هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ :"A guidance for the God-fearing": The Arabic word for the God-fearing is *Muttaqīn*, derived from *Taqwā* which literally means "to fear, to refrain from", and in Islamic terminology it signifies fearing Allah and refraining from the transgression of His commandments. As for the Holy Qur'ān being a guidance to the God-fearing, it actually means that although the Holy Qur'ān provides guidance not only to mankind but to all existents in the universe, yet the special guidance which is the means of salvation in the other world is reserved for the God-fearing alone. We have already explained in the commentary on the Sūrah "Al-Fātiḥah" that there are three degrees of divine guidance - the first degree being common to the whole of mankind and even to animals etc., the second being particular to men and *jinns*, and the third being special to those who are close to Allah and have found His favour, the different levels of this last degree being limitless. It is the last two degrees of guidance which are intended in the verse under discussion. With regard to the second degree, the implication is that those who accept the guidance will have the hope of being elevated to the rank of the God-fearing. With reference to the third degree, the suggestion is that those who are already God-fearing may receive further and limitless guidance through the Holy Qur'ān. This explanation should be sufficient to remove the objection that guidance is needed much more by those who are not God-fearing, for now we know that the specification of the God-fearing does not entail a denial of guidance to those who not possess this qualification.

The next two verses delineate the characteristic qualities of the God-fearing, suggesting that these are the people who have received guidance, whose path is the straight path, and that he who seeks the straight path should join their company, adopt their beliefs and their

way of life. It is perhaps in order to enforce this suggestion that the Holy Qur'ān, immediately after pointing out the attributes peculiar to the God-fearing, proceeds to say:

أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ۝

It is these who are on guidance given by their Lord, and it is just these who are successful.

The delineation of the qualities of the God-fearing in these two verses also contains, in essence, a definition of Faith (*'Īmān*) and an account of its basic tenets and of the fundamental principles of righteous conduct:

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ ۝

Who believe in the unseen, and are steadfast in *Salah* and spend out of what We have provided them.

Thus, the first of the two verses, mentions three qualities of the God-fearing - belief in the unseen, being steadfast in *Salāh*, and spending in the way of Allah. Many important considerations arise out of this verse, the most significant being the meaning and definition of *'Īmān* (Faith).

Who are the God-fearing

The Definition of *'Īmān*

The Holy Qur'ān has provided a comprehensive defination of *'Iman* in only two words يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ "Believe in the unseen". If one has fully understood the meaning of the words *'Īmān* and *Ghayb*, one will have also understood the essential reality of *'Īmān*.

Lexically, the Arabic word *'Īmān* signifies accepting with complete certitude the statement made by someone out of one's total confidence and trust in him. Endorsing someone's statement with regard to sensible or observable facts is, therefore, not *'Īmān*. For example, if one man describes a piece of cloth as black, and another man endorses the statement, it may be called *Taṣdīq* (confirmation) but not *'Īmān*, for such an endorsement is based on personal observation, and does, in no way, involve any confidence or trust in the man who has made the statement. In the terminology of the *Sharī'ah*, *'Īmān* signifies accepting with complete certitude the statement made by a prophet

only out of one's total confidence and trust in him and without the need of personal observation.[1]

As for the word *Ghaib*, lexically it denotes things which are not known to man in an evident manner, or which are not apprehensible through the five senses. The Holy Qur'ān uses this word to indicate all the things which we cannot know through the five senses or through reason, but which have been reported to us by the Holy Prophet ﷺ. These include the essence and the attributes of Allah, matters pertaining to destiny, heaven and hell and what they contain, the Day of Judgment and the things which happen on that Day, divine books, all the prophets who have preceded the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in short, all the things mentioned in the last two verses of the Sūrah Al-Baqarah. Thus, the third verse of the Sūrah states the basic creed of the Islamic faith in its essence, while the last two verses provide the details.

So, belief in the unseen ultimately comes to mean having firm faith in everything that the Holy Prophet has taught us - subject to the necessary condition that the teaching in question must have come down to us through authentic and undeniable sources. This is how the overwhelming majority of Muslim scholars generally define *'Iman* (See al-'Aqidah al-Tahawiyyah, 'Aqa'id al-Nasafi etc.).

According to this definition, *'Īmān* signifies faith and certitude, and not mere knowledge. For, a mental knowledge of the truth is possessed by Satan himself, and even by many disbelievers - for example, they knew very well that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was truthful and that his teachings were true, but they did not have faith in him nor did they accept his teachings with their heart, and hence they are not Muslims.

The Meaning of 'Establishing' *Salāh*

2. The second quality of the God-fearing is that they are "steadfast in the prayer." The verb employed by the Holy Qur'ān here is

1. It would be helpful to note that in the everday idiom of the West, and even in modern social sciences, "faith" has come to mean no more than an intense emotional state or "a fixe emotion". As against this, the Islamic conception of *'Īmān* is essentially intellectual, in the original signification of "Intellect" which the modern West has altogether forgotten.

Yuqīmūna (generally rendered in English translations as "they establish", which comes from the word *Iqamah* signifying "to straighten out"). So, the verb implies not merely saying one's prayers, but performing the prayers correctly in all possible ways and observing all the prescribed conditions, whether obligatory (*Farḍ*) or necessary (*Wājib*) or commendable (*Mustahabb*). The concept includes regularity and perpetuity in the performance of *Ṣalāh* as also an inward concentration, humility and awe. At this point, it may be noted that the term does not mean a particular *ṣalāh*, instead, it includes all *farḍ, wājib* and *nafl* prayers.

Now to sum up - the God-fearing are those who offer their prayers regularly and steadfastly in accordance with the regulations of the Sharī'ah, and also observe the spiritual etiquette outwardly and inwardly.

Spending in the way of Allah: Categories

The third quality of the God-fearing is that they spend in the way of Allah. The correct position in this respect, which has been adopted by the majority of commentators, is that it includes all the forms of spending in the way of Allah, whether it be the *farḍ* (obligatory) *Zakāh* or the *Wājib* (necessary) alms-giving or just voluntary and *nafl* (supererogatory) acts of charity. For, the Holy Qur'an usually employs the word *Infaq* with reference to *nafl* (supererogatory) alms-giving or in a general sense, but reserves the word *Zakāh* for the obligatory alms-giving. The simple phrase: مِمَّا رَزَقْنٰهُمْ : "Spend out of what We have provided them" inspires us to spend in the way of Allah by drawing our attention to the fact that anything and everything we possess is a gift from Allah and His trust in our hands, and that even if we spend all our possessions in the way of Allah, it would be proper and just and no favour to Him. But Allah in His mercy asks us to spend in His way "out of" what (مِمَّا) he has provided - that is, only a part and not the whole.

Among the three qualities of the God-fearing, faith is, of course, the most important, for it is the basic principle of all other principles, and no good deed can find acceptance or validity without faith. The other two qualities pertain to good deeds. Now, good deeds are many; one could make a long list of even those which are either obligatory or

necessary. So, the question arises as to why the Holy Qur'ān should be content to choose for mention only two - namely, performing *Ṣalāh* and spending in the way of Allah. In answering this question, one could say that all the good deeds which are obligatory or necessary for man pertain either to his person and his body or to his possessions. Among the personal and bodily forms of *'Ibādat* (acts of worship), the most important is the *Ṣalah*. Hence the Holy Qur'an mentions only this form in the present passage. As for the different forms of *'Ibadat* pertaining to possessions, the word *Infaq* (spending) covers all of them. Thus, in mentioning only two good deeds, the Holy Qur'ān has by implication included all the forms of worship and all good deeds. The whole verse, then, comes to mean that the God-fearing are those who are perfect in their faith and in their deeds both, and that Islam is the sum of faith and practice. In other words, while providing a complete definition of *'Īmān* (Faith), the verse indicates the meaning of Islam as well. So, let us find out how *'Īmān* and Islam are distinct from each other.

The distinction between *'Īmān* and Islam

Lexically, *'Īmān* signifies the acceptance and confirmation of something with one's heart, while Islam signifies obedience and submission. *'Īmān* pertains to the heart; so does Islam, but it is related to all the other parts of the human body as well. From the point of view of the Shari'ah, however, *'Īmān* is not valid without Islam, nor Islam without *'Īmān*. In other words, it is not enough to have faith in Allah and the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in one's heart unless the tongue expresses the faith and also affirms one's allegiance and submission. Similarly, an oral declaration of faith and allegiance is not valid unless one has faith in one's heart.

In short, *'Īmān*, and Islam have different connotations from the lexical point of view. It is on the basis of this lexical distinction that the Holy Qur'ān and Ḥadīth refer to a difference between the two. From the point of view of the *Sharī'ah*, however, the two are inextricably linked together, and one cannot be valid without the other - as is borne out by the Holy Qur'ān itself.

When Islam, or an external declaration of allegiance, is not

accompanied by *'Īmān* or internal faith, the Holy Qur'ān terms it as *Nifāq* (hypocrisy), and condemns it as a greater crime than an open rejection of Islam:

إِنَّ الْمُنٰفِقِيْنَ فِي الدَّرْكِ الْاَسْفَلِ مِنَ النَّارِ

Surely the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of Hell. (4:145)

In explanation of this verse let us add that so far as the physical world goes, we can only be sure of the external state of a man, and cannot know his internal state with any degree of certainty. So in the case of men who orally declare themselves to be Muslims without having faith in their heart, the Shari'ah requires us to deal with them as we would deal with a Muslim in worldly affairs; but in the other world their fate would be worse than that of the ordinary disbelievers. Similarly, if *'Īmān* or acknowledgment in the heart is not accompanied by external affirmation and allegiance, the Holy Qur'ān regards this too as *kufr* or rejection and denial of the Truth - speaking of the infidels, it says:

يَعْرِفُوْنَهٗ كَمَا يَعْرِفُوْنَ اَبْنَآءَ هُمْ

They know him (that is, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم) as they know their own sons (2:146);

or in another palce:

جَحَدُوْا بِهَا وَاسْتَيْقَنَتْهَآ اَنْفُسُهُمْ ظُلْمًا وَّعُلُوًّا

Their souls knew them (the signs sent by Allah) to be true, yet they denied them in their wickedness and their pride. (27:14)

My respected teacher, 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Anwar Shāh used to explain it thus - the expanse which *'Īmān* and Islam have to cover in the spiritual journey is the same, and the difference lies only in the beginning and the end; that is to say, *'Īmān* starts from the heart and attains perfection in external deeds, while Islam starts from external deeds and can be regarded as perfect when it reaches the heart.

To sum up, *Īmān* is not valid, if acknowledgment in the heart does not attain to external affirmation and allegiance; similarly, Islam is not valid, if external affirmation and allegiance does not attain to confirmation by the heart. Imām Ghazzālī and Imām Subki both have arrived at the same conclusion, and in *Musāmarah*, Imām Ibn

al-Humām reports the agreement of all the authentic scholars in this respect.[2]

...who believe in what has been revealed to you and in what has been revealed before you, and do have faith in the Hereafter.

This verse speaks of some other attributes of the God-fearing, giving certain details about faith in the unseen with a special mention of

2. Today one finds a very wide-spread confusion, sometimes amounting to a total incomprehension, with regard to the distinction between Islam and 'Īmān, essentially under the influence of Western modes of thought and behaviour and, to be more specific, that of the ever-proliferating Protestant sects and schools of theology. Since the middle of the 19th century there have sprouted in almost every Muslim country a host of self-styled Reformists, Revivalists, Modernists et al, each pretending to have understood the "real" Islam for the first time, and each adopting an extremist, though untenable, posture with regard to Islam and 'Īmān. On the one hand, we have people claiming that Islam is only a matter of the "heart" (a word which has during the last four hundred years been used in the West as an equivalent of "emotion" or, worse still, of "emotional agitation") or of "religious experience" (a very modish term brought into currency by William James). As a corollary, they stubbornly refuse to see the need for a fixed ritual or an ethical code, all of which they gladly leave to social exigency or individual preference. They base their claims on the unquestioned axiom that religion is "personal" relationship between the individual and "his" God. It is all too obvious that this genre of Modernist "Islam" is the progeny of Martin Luther with cross-pollination from Rousseau. On the other hand, we have fervent and sometimes violent champions of Islam insisting on a merely external performance of rituals - more often on a mere conformity to moral regulations, and even these, of their liking. They would readily exclude, and are anyhow indifferent to, the internal dimension of Islam. A recent modification of this stance (in the wake of a certain Protestant pioneering, it goes without saying) has been to replace divinely ordained rituals by acts of social service or welfare, giving them the status and value of acts of worship. Counselling on divorce, abortion, premarital sex and the rest of the baggage having already become a regular part of the functions of a Protestant clergyman, it would not be too fond to expect, even on the part of our Modernists, the speedy inclusion of acts of entertainment as well. There is still another variety of deviationists, more visible and vociferous than the rest, and perhaps more pervasive and pernicious in their influence, finding easy credence among a certain section of Muslims with a sloppy western-style education. While dispensing with the subtle distinctions between Islam and 'Īmān, they reduce Islam itself to a mere system of social organization, or even to state-craft. According to their way of looking at things, if Muslims fail to set up a social and political organization of a specified shape, they would cease to be Muslims. Applied to the history of Islam, this fanciful notion would lead **(Continued)**

faith in hereafter. Commenting on this verse, the blessed Companions 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd and 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās رضی اللہ عنہم اجمعین have said that in the days of the Holy Prophet ﷺ God-fearing Muslims were of two kinds, - those who used to be associators and disbelievers but accepted Islam, and those who used to be among the people of the Book (that is, Jews and Christians) but embraced Islam later on; the preceding verse refers to the first group, and this verse to the second. Hence this verse specifically mentions belief in the earlier Divine Books along with belief in the Holy Qur'ān, for, according to the *Hadīth*, people in the second group deserve a double recompense, firstly, for believing in and following the earlier Books before the Holy Qur'ān came to replace them, and secondly, for believing in and following the Holy Qur'ān when it came as the final Book of Allah. Even today it is obligatory for every Muslim to believe in the earlier Divine Books except that now the belief has to take this form: everything that Allah has revealed in the earlier Books is true (excepting the changes and distortions introduced by selfish people), and that it was incumbent upon the people for whom those Books had been sent to act according to them, but now that all the earlier Books

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(Continued) to the grotesque conclusion that no Muslim had ever existed. These are only a few examples of the intellectual distortions produced by refusing to define Islam and 'Iman clearly and ignoring the distinction between the two. Contrary to all such modernizing deviations, Islam in fact means establishing a particular relationship of obedience and servitude with Allah. This relationship arises neither out of vague "religious experiences" nor out of social regimentation; in order to attain it, one has to accept all the doctrines and to act upon all the commandments specified in the Holy Qur'an, the Hadith and the Shari'ah. These doctrines and commandments cover all the spheres of human life, individual or collective, right up from acts of worship down to social, political and economic relations among men, and codes of ethics and behaviour, morals and manners, and their essential purpose is to produce in man a genuine attitude of obedience to Allah. If one acts according to the Shari'ah, one, no doubt, gains many worldly benefits, individual as well as collective. These benefits may be described as the raison d'etre of the commandments, but are in no way their essential object, nor should a servant of Allah seek them for themselves in obeying Him, nor does the success or failure of a Muslim as a Muslim depend on attaining them. When a man has fully submitted himself to the commandments of Allah in everything he does, he has already succeeded as a Muslim, whether he receives the related worldly benefits or not.

and Shari'ahs have been abrogated, one must act according to the Holy Qur'an alone. [3]

3. Exactly as predicted by a Hadith, today we see all around us a proliferation of "knowledge" and of "writing". One of the dangerous forms the process has taken is the indiscriminate translation at least into European languages and the popularization of the sacred books of all possible religious and metaphysical traditions - not only the Hindu, the Chinese or the Japanese, but also the Shamanic or the Red Indian. The lust for reading sacred books has virtually grown into a mania, specially among the modern young people with their deep sense of being uprooted and disinherited, and all considerations of aptitude have been contemptuously set aside. In these circumstances, Muslims with a Western orientation are naturally impelled to ask themselves as to what they can or should make of such books which sometimes seem to offer similarities and parallels to the Holy Qur'an itself, and more often to the Sufi doctrines. The problem has already attained noticeable proportions, for in 1974 the government of Turkey found it necessary to ban the entry of certain Hindu sacred books like the Bhagavadgita and Upanishads. The correct doctrinal position in this respect is that it is obligatory for every Muslim, as an essential part of the Islamic creed, to believe in all the prophets and messengers of Allah and in the Divine Books (not in their distorted forms, but as they were originally revealed) that have specifically been mentioned by their names in the Holy Qur'an, and also to believe that Allah has sent His messengers and His books for the guidance of all the peoples and all the ages, and that Muhammad ﷺ is the last prophet and the Holy Qur'an the final Book of Allah which has come down to replace the earlier Books and Shari'ahs. As to the question of the authenticity and divine origin of a particular book held in reverence by an earlier religion or metaphysical tradition, a Muslim is not allowed to affirm such a claim unequivocally, nor should he unnecessarily reject such a possibility. In so far as contents of the book concerned agree with what the Holy Qur'an has to say on the subject, we may accept the statement as true, otherwise spiritual etiquette requires an average Muslim to keep quiet and not meddle with things which he is not likely to understand. As for reading the sacred books of other traditions, it should be clearly borne in mind that a comparative study of this nature requires a very special aptitude which is extremely rare, and hence demands great caution. A cursory reading of sacred books, motivated by an idle curiosity or by a craze for mere information, may very well lead to an intellectual disintegration or to something still worse, instead of helping in the "discovery of the truth" and the acquisition of "peace" which a comparative study is widely supposed to promise. Even when the aptitude and the knowledge necessary for the task is present, such a study can be carried out only under the supervision of an authentic spiritual master. In any case, we cannot insist too much on the perils of the enterprise.

An argument to the Finality of Prophethood

The mode of expression helps us to infer from this verse the fundamental principle that the Holy Prophet Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم is the last of all the prophets, and the Book revealed to him is the final revelation and the last Book of Allah. For, had Allah intended to reveal another Book or to continue. The mode of revelation even after the Holy Qur'ān, this verse, while prescribing belief in the earlier Books as necessary for Muslims, must also have referred to belief in the Book or Books to be revealed in the future. In fact, such a statement was all the more needed, for people were already familiar with the necessity of believing in the Torah, the Evangile and the earlier Books, and such a belief was in regular practice too, but if prophethood and revelation were to continue even after the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم , it was essential that the coming of another prophet and another book should be clearly indicated so that people were not left in doubt about this possibility. So, in defining *'Īmān*, the Holy Qur'ān mentions the earlier prophets and the earlier Books, but does not make the slightest reference to a prophet or Book to come after the last Prophet ﷺ . The matter does not end with this verse. The Holy Qur'ān touches upon the subject again and again in no less than forty or fifty verses, and in all such places it mentions the prophets, the Books and the revelation preceding the Holy Prophet ﷺ but nowhere is there even so much as a hint with regard to the coming of a prophet or of a revelation in the future, belief in whom or which should be necessary. We cite some verses to demonstrate the point:

وَمَآ اُنْزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ

And what We have sent down before you. (16:43)

وَلَقَدْ اَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلًا مِّنْ قَبْلِكَ

And We have certainly sent messengers before you". (40:78)

وَلَقَدْ اَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ رُسُلًا

And certainly before you We have sent messengers. (20:47)

وَمَآ اُنْزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ

And what was revealed before you. (4:60)

وَلَقَدْ اُوْحِیَ اِلَیْكَ وَ اِلَی الَّذِیْنَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ

And it has certainly been revealed to you and to those who have gone before you... (39:65)

كَذٰلِكَ یُوْحِیْٓ اِلَیْكَ وَ اِلَی الَّذِیْنَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ

Thus He reveals to you and He revealed to those who have gone before you. (42:3)

كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَی الَّذِیْنَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ

Fasting is decreed (literally, written) for you as it was decreed for those before you. (2:183)

سُنَّةَ مَنْ قَدْ اَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ مِنْ رُّسُلِنَا

Such was Our way with the messengers whom We sent before you. (17:77)

In these and similar verses, whenever the Holy Qur'ān speaks of the sending down of a Book or a revelation or a prophet or a messenger, it always attaches the conditional phrase, *Min qabl* (before) or *Min Qablik* (before you), and nowhere does it employ or suggest an expression like *min ba'd* (after you). Even if other verses of the Holy Qur'an had not been explicit about the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ and about the cessation of revelation, the mode of expression adopted by the Holy Qur'ān in the present verse would in itself have been sufficient to prove these points.

The God-fearing have Faith in the Hereafter

The other essential quality of the God-fearing mentioned in this verse is that they have faith in *Al-Ākhirah* (the Hereafter). Lexically the *Akhirah* signifies 'that which comes after something'; in the present context, it indicates a relationship of contrast with the physical world, and thus signifies the other world which is beyond physical reality as we know it and also beyond the sensuous or rational perception of man. The Holy Qur'an gives to the Hereafter other names too - for example, *Dar al-Qarar* (the Ever-lasting Abode), *Dar al-Hayawān* (the Abode of Eternal Life) and *Al-'Uqba* (the Consequent). The Holy Qur'ān is full of vivid descriptions of the Hereafter, of the joys of heaven and of the horrors of hell. Although faith in the Hereafter is included in faith in the unseen which has

already been mentioned, yet the Holy Qur'ān refers to it specifically because it may, in a sense, be regarded as the most important among the constitutive elements of faith in so far as it inspires man to translate faith into practice, and motivates him to act in accordance with the requirements of his faith. Along with the two doctrines of the Oneness of God and of prophethood, this is the third doctrine which is common to all the prophets and upon which all the Shari'ahs are agreed.[4]

Faith in the Hereafter: A revolutionary belief

The belief in the Hereafter, among Islamic doctrines, is the one whose role in history has been what is nowadays described as revolutionary, for it began with transmuting the morals and manners of the followers of the Holy Qur'ān, and gradually gave them a place of distinction and eminence even in the political history of mankind. The reason is obvious. Consider the case of those who believe that life in the physical world is the only life, its joys the only joys and its pains the only pains, whose only goal is to seek the pleasures of the senses and the fulfilment of physical or emotional needs, and who stubbornly refuse to believe in the life of the Hereafter, in the Day of Judgment

4. There is a deplorable misconception with regard to the Hereafter, quite wide-spread among those who are not, or do not want to be, familiar with the Holy Qur'ān and who have at the same time been touched by the rationalism, materialism and libertarianism of the Western society, which makes them cherish certain mental and emotional reservations at least about the horrors of hell, if not about the joys of heaven. Some of them have gone to the preposterous length of supposing that these are the inventions of the 'Ulama' whom they describe as 'abscurantists' - of course, in the jargon of the Western Reformation and of the so-called Enlightenment. They ignore the obvious fact that faith in the Holy Qur'ān necessitates faith in every word of the Holy Qur'ān, and that it is not possible to affirm one part of the Book while denying another and yet remain a Muslim-- أَفَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِبَعْضِ الْكِتَابِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ : "What, do you believe in one part of the Book and deny another?"(2:85) Moreover, these enlightened Muslims have never made a serious attempt to take into account the complex historical factors that led to the rise of the Enlightenment in Europe, nor the meaning of the subsequent development in ethical ideas. We may, therefore, give a few and very brief indications. There has been no dearth, even in the hey-day of the Enlightenment, of thinkers who have had no scruples in dispensing with ethics altogether which they look upon as superstition or tyranny and hence a blight for the human personality.

Continued

and the assessment of everyone's deeds, and in the requital of the deeds in the other world. When such people find the distinction between truth and falsehood, between the permissible and the forbidden, interfering with the hunt for the gratification of their desires, such differentiations naturally become intolerable to them.

Now, who or what can effectively prevent them from committing crimes? The penal laws made by the state or by any other human authority can never serve either as real deterrents to crime or as agents of moral reform. Habitual criminals soon grow used to the penalties. A man, milder or gentler of temperament or just timid, may agree to forego the satisfaction of his desires for fear of punishment, but he would do so only to the extent that he is in danger of being caught. But in his privacy where the laws of the state cannot encroach upon his freedom of action, who can force him to renounce his pleasures and accept the yoke of restraints? It is the belief in the Hereafter and the fear of Allah, and that alone, which can bring man's private behaviour in line with his public behaviour, and establish a harmony between the inner state and the outer. For the God-fearing man knows for certain that even in the secrecy of a well-guarded and sealed room and in the darkness of night somebody is watching him, and somebody is writing down the smallest thing he does. Herein lies the secret of the clean and pure society which arose in the early days of Islam when the mere sight of a Muslim, of his manners and morals, was enough to make non-believers literally fall in love with Islam. For

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(Continued) But even those thinkers who have recognised the indispensable need for regulations and rules, if not principles, for human conduct in order to preserve social order or to make social life possible, have in general had no qualms about discarding the very idea of divine sanction - despite the intimation of Voltaire, the arch-priest of relationalism, that man would have to invent God, even if He did not exist. As to the nature and origin of the ethical regulations and the sanction behind them, Western thinkers have from time to time tried to promote various agencies - the sovereign state, social will or convention or custom, the supposedly pure and innocent nature of man himself with its capacity for self-regulation, and finally biological laws. The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed the withering away of all these ethical authorities which has left the modern man without even a dim prospect of constructing a new illusion. It is only in this perspective that one can properly consider the significance of the belief in the hereafter for human society.

true Faith in the Hereafter, certitude must follow Oral Affirmation.

Before we proceed, we may point out that in speaking of faith in the hereafter as one of the qualities of the God-fearing, the Holy Qur'ān does not use the word *yu'minūna* (believe) but the word *yūqinūna* (have complete certitude), for the opposite of belief is denial, and that of certitude is doubt and hesitation. Thus, we find a subtle suggestion here that in order to attain the perfection of *'Īmān* it is not enough to affirm the hereafter orally, but one must have a complete certitude which leaves no room for doubt - the kind of certitude which comes when one has seen a thing with one's own eyes. It is an essential quality of the God-fearing that they always have present before their eyes the whole picture of how people will have to present themselves for judgment before Allah in the hereafter, how their deeds will be assessed and how they will receive reward or punishment according to what they have been doing in this world. A man who amasses wealth by usurping what righfully belongs to others, or who gains petty material ends by adopting unlawful means forbidden by Allah, may declare his faith in the hereafter a thousand times and the Shari'ah may accept him as a Muslim in the context of worldly concerns, but he does not possess the certitude which the Holy Qur'ān demands of him. And it is this certitude alone which transforms human life, and which brings in its wake as a reward the guidance and triumph promised in verse 5 of this Sūrah:

أُولٰٓئِكَ عَلٰى هُدًى مِّنْ رَّبِّهِمْ وَ أُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُوْنَ

It is these who are on guidance given by their Lord; and it is just these who are successful.

Verses 6-7

اِنَّ الَّذِيْنَ كَفَرُوْا سَوَآءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَاَنْذَرْتَهُمْ اَمْ لَمْ تُنْذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُوْنَ ۝ خَتَمَ اللّٰهُ عَلٰى قُلُوْبِهِمْ وَعَلٰى سَمْعِهِمْ ؕ وَعَلٰٓى اَبْصَارِهِمْ غِشَاوَةٌ ۖ وَّلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيْمٌ ۝

Surely for those who have disbelieved, it is all the same whether you warn them or you warn them not: they would not believe. Allah has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes there is a

covering; and for them there lies a mighty punishment. (Verses 6-7)

After affirming the Holy Qur'ān as the Book of Guidance and as being beyond all doubt, the first five verses of the present Surah refer to those who derive full benefit from this Book and whom the Holy Qur'ān has named as *Mū'minūn* (true Muslims) or *Muttaqūn* (the God-fearing), and also delineate their characteristic qualities which distinguish them from others. The next fifteen verses speak of those who refuse to accept this guidance, and even oppose it out of sheer spite and blind malice. In the time of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم there were two distinct groups of such people. On the one hand were those who came out in open hostility and rejection, and whom the Holy Qur'ān has termed as *kafirūn* (disbelievers); on the other hand were those who did not, on account of their moral depravity and greed, had even the courage to speak out their minds and to express their disbelief clearly, but adopted the way of deceit and duplicity. They tried to convince the Muslims that they had faith in the Holy Qur'ān and its teachings, that they were as good a Muslim as any and would support the Muslims against the disbelievers. But they nursed denial and rejection in their hearts, and would, in the company of disbelievers, assure them that they had nothing to do with Islam, but mixed with Muslims in order to deceive them and to spy on them. The Holy Qur'an has given them the title of *Munāfiqūn* (hypocrites). Thus, these fifteen verses deal with those who refuse to believe in the Holy Qur'ān - the first two are concerned with open disbelievers, and the other thirteen with hypocrites, their signs and characteristics and their ultimate end.

Taking the first twenty verses of this Sūrah together in all their detail, one can see that the Holy Qur'ān has, on the one hand, pointed out to us the source of guidance which is the Book itself, and, on the other, divided mankind into two distinct groups on the basis of their acceptance or rejection of this guidance - on the one side are those who have chosen to follow and to receive guidance, and are hence called *Mū'minūn* (true Muslims) or *Muttaqūn* (the God-fearing); on the other side are those who reject the guidance or deviate from it, and are hence called *Kāfirūn* (disbelievers) or *Munafiqūn* (hypocrites). People of the first kind are those whose path is the object of the prayer at the

end of the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah, صِرَاطَ الَّذِيْنَ اَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ : "the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace", and people of the second kind are those against whose path refuge has been sought غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوْبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّآلِّيْنَ "Not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.

This teaching of the Holy Qur'ān provides us with a fundamental principle. A division of mankind into different groups must, in order to be meaningful, be based on differences in principle, not on considerations of birth, race, colour, geography or language. The Holy Qur'ān has given a clear verdict in this respect:

خَلَقَكُمْ فَمِنْكُمْ كَافِرٌ وَّمِنْكُمْ مُّؤْمِنٌ

"It was He that created you: yet some of you are disbelievers and some of you are believers" (64:2).

As we have said, the first two verses of this Sūrah speak of those disbelievers who had become so stubborn and obstinate in their denial and disbelief that they were not prepared to hear the truth or to consider a clear argument. In the case of such depraved people, the usual way of Allah has always been, and is, that they are given a certain kind of punishment even in this world - that is to say, their hearts are sealed and their eyes and ears stopped against the truth, and in so far as truth is concerned they become as if they have no mind to think, no eyes to see and no ears to listen. The last phrase of the second verse speaks of the grievous punishment that is reserved for them in the other world. It may be observed that the prediction that: لَا يُؤْمِنُوْنَ : "they shall not believe" is specifically related to those disbelievers who refused to listen to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and who, as Allah knew, were going to die as disbelievers. This does not apply to disbelievers in general, for there were many who later accepted Islam.

What is *Kufr* ? (Infidelity)

As for the definition of *kufr* (disbelief), we may point out that lexically the word means to hide, to conceal. Ingratitude is also called *kufr*, because it involves the concealing or the covering up of the beneficence shown by someone. In the terminology of the Sharī'ah, *kufr* signifies the denial of any of those things in which it is obligatory to believe. For example, the quintessence of *'Īmān* as well as the very

basis of the Islamic creed is the requirement that one should confirm with one's heart and believe with certitude everything that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has brought down to us from Allah and which has been established by definite and conclusive proof; therefore, a man who has the temerity to question or disregard even a single teaching of this kind will be described as a *kāfir* (disbeliever or infidel).

The meaning of '*Indhār*' (warning) by a Prophet

In translating the first of these two verses, we have used the English verb 'to warn' for the Arabic word *Indhār*. This word actually signifies bringing news which should cause alarm or concern, while *Ibshār* signifies bringing good news which should make people rejoice. Moreover, *Indhār* is not the ordinary kind of warning meant to frighten people, but one which is motivated by compassion and love, just as one warns one's children against fire or snakes or beasts. Hence a thief or a bandit or an aggressor who warns or threatens others cannot be called a *Nadhīr* (warner). The latter is a title specially reserved for the prophets عليهم السلام , for they warn people against the pains and punishments of the other world out of their compassion and love for their fellow men. In choosing this title for the prophets, the Holy Qur'ān has made the subtle suggestion that for those who go out to reform others it is not enough merely to convey a message, but that they must speak to their listeners with sympathy, understanding and a genuine regard for their good.

In order to comfort the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم the first of these verses tells him that some of the disbelievers are so vain, arrogant and opinionated that they, in spite of recognizing the truth, stubbornly persist in their refusal and are not prepared to hear the truth or to see obvious proofs, so that all the efforts he makes for reforming and converting them will bear no fruit, and for them it is all one whether he tries or not.

The next verse explains the reason, that is, Allah has set a seal on their hearts and ears, there is a covering on their eyes, all the avenues of knowing and understanding are thus closed, and now it would be futile to expect any change in them. A thing is sealed so that nothing may enter it from outside; the setting of a seal on their hearts and ears

also means that they have altogether lost the capacity for accepting the truth.

The Holy Qur'ān describes the condition of these disbelievers in terms of their hearts and ears having been sealed, but in the case of the eyes it refers to a covering. The subtle distinction arises from the fact that an idea can enter the heart from all possible directions and not from one particular direction alone, and so can a sound enter the ears; an idea or a sound can be blocked only by sealing the heart and the ears. On the contrary, the eyes work only in one direction, and can see only the things which lie in front of them; if there is a covering on them, they cease to function. (See Mazharī)

Favour withdrawn by Allah is a punishment

These two verses tell us that the other world is the place where one would receive the real punishment for one's disbelief or for some of one's sins. One may, however, receive some punishment for certain sins even in this world. Such a punishment sometimes takes a very grievous form - that is, the divine favour which helps one to reform oneself is withdrawn, so that, ignoring how one's deeds are to be assessed on the Day of Judgment, one keeps growing in disobedience and sin, and finally comes to lose even the awareness of evil. In delineating such a situation certain elders have remarked that one punishment for an evil deed is another evil deed which comes after, and one reward for a good deed is another good deed which comes after. According to a *Ḥadīth*, when a man commits a sin, a black dot appears on his heart; this first dot disturbs him just as a smudge on a white cloth is always displeasing to us; but if, instead of asking Allah's pardon for the first sin, he proceeds to commit a second, another dot shows up, thus, with every new sin the black dots go on multiplying till the whole heart turns dark, and now he can no longer see good as good nor evil as evil, and grows quite incapable of making such distinctions. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم added that The Holy Qur'ān uses the term *Ra'n* or *Rain* (rust) for this darkness: as in Mishkāt from the Musnad of Aḥmad and Tirmidhī.

كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِم مَّا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

No. But what they did has rusted their hearts (83:14)

According to another authentic Ḥadīth reported by Tirmidhī from the blessed Companion Abu Hurairah رضى الله عنه the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said, "When a man commits a sin, his heart grows dark, but if he seeks Allah's pardon, it becomes clear again". (See Qurṭubī)

It should be carefully noted that in announcing that it is all one whether the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم warns the disbelievers or not, the Holy Qur'an adds the condition *'Alaihim* (for them), which clearly indicates that it is all one for the disbelievers alone, and not for the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم , for he would in any case get a reward for bringing the message of Allah to his fellow-men and for his efforts to teach and reform them. That is why there is not a single verse in the Holy Qur'ān which should dissuade the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم from calling even such people to Islam. From this we may infer that the man who strives to spread the Word of Allah and to reform his fellow-men does always get a reward for his good deed, even if he has not been effective.

A doubt is removed

We may also answer a question which sometimes arises in connection with the second of these two verses that speaks of the hearts and the ears of the disbelievers having been sealed and of their eyes being covered. We find a similar statement in another verse of the Holy Qur'ān:

كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِم مَّا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

No. But what they did has rusted their hearts. (83:14)

which makes it plain that it is their arrogance and their evil deeds themselves that have settled on their hearts as a rust. In the verse under discussion, it is this very rust which has been described as 'a seal' or 'a covering'. So, there is no occasion here to raise the objection that if Allah Himself has sealed their hearts and blocked their senses, they are helpless and cannot be held responsible for being disbelievers, and hence they should not be punished for what they have not themselves chosen to do. If we consider the two verses (2:7 and 83:14) together, we can easily see why they should be punished - in adopting the way of arrogance and pride they have, wilfully and out of their own choice, destroyed their capacity for accepting the truth, and thus they

themselves are the authors of their own ruin. But Allah, being Creator of all the actions of His creatures, has in verse 2:7 attributed to Himself the setting of a seal on the hearts and the ears of the disbelievers, and has thus pointed out that when these people insisted, as a matter of their own choice, on destroying their aptitude for receiving the truth, Allah produced, as is His way in such cases, the state of insensitivity in their hearts and senses.

Verses 8-20

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَّقُوْلُ اٰمَنَّا بِاللّٰهِ وَبِالْيَوْمِ الْاٰخِرِ وَمَا هُمْ
بِمُؤْمِنِيْنَ ۝ يُخٰدِعُوْنَ اللّٰهَ وَالَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا ۚ وَمَا يَخْدَعُوْنَ اِلَّآ
اَنْفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُوْنَ ۝ فِيْ قُلُوْبِهِمْ مَّرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللّٰهُ مَرَضًا ۚ
وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ اَلِيْمٌ ۢ بِمَا كَانُوْا يَكْذِبُوْنَ ۝ وَاِذَا قِيْلَ لَهُمْ لَا
تُفْسِدُوْا فِي الْاَرْضِ قَالُوْٓا اِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُوْنَ ۝ اَلَآ اِنَّهُمْ هُمُ
الْمُفْسِدُوْنَ وَلٰكِنْ لَّا يَشْعُرُوْنَ ۝ وَاِذَا قِيْلَ لَهُمْ اٰمِنُوْا كَمَآ اٰمَنَ
النَّاسُ قَالُوْٓا اَنُؤْمِنُ كَمَآ اٰمَنَ السُّفَهَآءُ ۭ اَلَآ اِنَّهُمْ هُمُ السُّفَهَآءُ
وَلٰكِنْ لَّا يَعْلَمُوْنَ ۝ وَاِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا قَالُوْٓا اٰمَنَّا ۚ وَاِذَا
خَلَوْا اِلٰى شَيٰطِيْنِهِمْ قَالُوْٓا اِنَّا مَعَكُمْ اِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُسْتَهْزِءُوْنَ ۝
اَللّٰهُ يَسْتَهْزِئُ بِهِمْ وَيَمُدُّهُمْ فِيْ طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُوْنَ ۝ اُولٰٓئِكَ
الَّذِيْنَ اشْتَرَوُا الضَّلٰلَةَ بِالْهُدٰى فَمَا رَبِحَتْ تِّجَارَتُهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوْا
مُهْتَدِيْنَ ۝ مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا ۚ فَلَمَّآ اَضَآءَتْ
مَا حَوْلَهٗ ذَهَبَ اللّٰهُ بِنُوْرِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِيْ ظُلُمٰتٍ لَّا يُبْصِرُوْنَ ۝
صُمٌّۢ بُكْمٌ عُمْيٌ فَهُمْ لَا يَرْجِعُوْنَ ۝ اَوْ كَصَيِّبٍ مِّنَ السَّمَآءِ فِيْهِ
ظُلُمٰتٌ وَّرَعْدٌ وَّبَرْقٌ ۚ يَجْعَلُوْنَ اَصَابِعَهُمْ فِيْٓ اٰذَانِهِمْ مِّنَ
الصَّوَاعِقِ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ ۭ وَاللّٰهُ مُحِيْطٌۢ بِالْكٰفِرِيْنَ ۝ يَكَادُ الْبَرْقُ
يَخْطَفُ اَبْصَارَهُمْ ۭ كُلَّمَآ اَضَآءَ لَهُمْ مَّشَوْا فِيْهِ ۙ وَاِذَآ اَظْلَمَ

عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُوْا ط وَلَوْ شَآءَ اللّٰهُ لَذَهَبَ بِسَمْعِهِمْ وَاَبْصَارِهِمْ ط اِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلٰى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيْرٌ ۝

And among men there are some who say, "We believe in Allah and in the Last Day", Yet they are no believers. They try to deceive Allah and those who believe, when they are deceiving none but their ownselves, and they are not aware. In their hearts there is a malady, so Allah has made them grow in their malady; and for them there lies a grievous punishment, for they have been lying. And when it is said to them, "Do not spread disorder on the earth", they say, "We are nothing but reformers." Beware, it is, in fact, they who spread disorder, but they are not aware. And when it is said to them, "Believe as people have believed," they say, "Shall we believe as fools believe?" Beware, it is, in fact, they who are the fools, but they do not know. And when they meet those who believe, they say, "We have entered Faith;" but when they are alone with their Satans, they say, "Indeed, we are with you; we were only mocking." It is Allah who mocks them, and lets them go on wandering blindly in their rebellion. These are the people who have bought error at the price of guidance; so their trade has brought no gain, nor have they found guidance. Their case is as if a man kindles a fire, and when it illuminates everything around him, Allah takes away their lights and leaves them in layers of darkness -- they see nothing. Deaf, dumb and blind, they shall not return. Or (it is) like a rainstorm from the sky carrying darkness, thunder and lightning; they thrust their fingers in their ears against thunderclaps for the fear of death, and Allah encompasses the disbelievers -- and lightning (all but) snatches away their eyes; every time a flash gives them light, they walk by it; and when darkness grows upon them, they stand still. And if Allah willed, He would certainly take away their hearing and their eye: surely Allah is powerful over everything. (Verses 8 - 20)

As we have seen, the Sūrah Al-Baqarah opens with the declaration that the Holy Qur'ān is beyond all doubt. The first twenty verses of the Sūrah delineate the features of those who believe in the Holy Qur'ān

and of those who do not -- the first five dealing with the former, under the title of *Al-Muttaqūn* (the God-fearing); the next two with those disbelievers who were quite open and violent in their hostility -- that is, *Al-Kafirūn* (the disbelievers or the infidels), and the following thirteen with those crafty disbelievers who claimed to be Muslims but, in reality, were not so. This second variety of the disbelievers has received from the Holy Qur'ān the name of *Al-Mūnāfiqūn* (the hypocrities).

Of these thirteen verses, the first two define the characteristic behaviour of the hypocrites thus:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَّقُوْلُ اٰمَنَّا بِاللّٰهِ وَبِالْيَوْمِ الْاٰخِرِ

> And among men there are some who say, 'We believe in Allah and in the Last Day',

yet they are no believers. They try to deceive Allah and those who believe, when they are deceiving none but their ownselves, and they are not aware. These verses expose their claim to be Muslims as false and deceitful, and show that they are only trying to be clever. Obviously, no one can deceive Allah - probably they themselves could not have had such a delusion. But the Holy Qur'ān equates, in a way, their attempt to deceive the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the Muslims with the desire to deceive Allah Himself (See Qurṭubī)

Such a desire, the Holy Qur'ān points out, can have only one consequence - they end up by deceiving no one but themselves, for Allah Himself cannot possibly be deceived, and Divine Revelation protects the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم from all trickery and deceit, so that the hypocrites themselves will have to bear, in the other world as well as in this, the punishment for their presumptuousness.

The third verse indicates why the hypocrites behave so foolishly and why they fail to see the folly of their course:

فِىْ قُلُوْبِهِمْ مَّرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللّٰهُ مَرَضًا

> In their hearts there is a malady, so Allah has made them grow in their malady.

Now, illness or disease, in the general medical sense, is a state in which a man has lost the balanced proportion of the elements within

him necessary to keep him healthy, so that his body can no longer function properly, which may finally lead to his total destruction. In the terminology of the Holy Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth, the word 'disease' is also applied to certain mental or psychic states (we are using the two terms in the original and more comprehensive sense) which hinder man from attaining any degree of spiritual perfection, for they gradually deprive him of the ability to perform good deeds, and even of ordinary human decency, till he meets with his spiritual death. The great spiritual master, Junaid of Baghdad, has said that just as the diseases of the body arise from an imbalance among the four humours, the diseases of the heart arise from a surrender to one's physical desires. According to the present verse, the disease hidden in their hearts is unbelief and rejection of the truth, which is as much a physical sickness as a spiritual one. It is all too obvious that being ungrateful to one's creator and nourisher and going against His commandments is to be spiritually sick. Moreover, to keep this disbelief concealed for the sake of petty worldly gains and not to have the courage to speak out one's mind is no less a disease of the soul. Hypocrisy is a physical disease too in so far as the hypocrite is always shuddering for fear of being exposed. Jealousy being a necessary ingredient of hypocrisy, he cannot bear to see the Muslims growing stronger in the world, and yet the poor hypocrite cannot even have the satisfaction of unburdening his heart of the venom. No wonder that all this tension should express itself in physical ailment.

As for Allah making them grow in their malady, it means that they are jealous of the growing strength of the Muslims, but it is Allah's will to make the position of the Muslims even stronger, as they can see for themselves, which feeds their bile and keeps the disease of their hearts growing.

The fourth and the fifth verses expose the sophistry of the hypocrites - their activities threatened to produce a general chaos and disorder, and yet, in their mealy-mouthed way, they pretended to be men of good will and to be serving the cause of peace and order. The Holy Qur'ān makes it clear that oral claims alone do not decide the question whether one is working for order or disorder, for what thief would call himself a thief? It depends on what one does, not on what

one says. If a man's activities do result in mischief, he will be called a mischief-maker, even if he had no such intention.

These two verses, thus, describe the state of their insensitivity and ignorance - they regard their defects as merits. The sixth verse shows the other aspect of this depravity - the merit of others (that is, the unalloyed faith of the Muslims) changes into a defect, and even becomes contemptible in their eyes.[5]

This verse also places before the hypocrites a criterion of true faith (*'Īmān*): اٰمِنُوْا كَمَآ اٰمَنَ النَّاسُ :"Believe as people have believed". According to the consensus of commentators, the Arabic word *Nās*: الناس (people) in this verse refers to the blessed Companions of the Holy Prophet ﷺ because it is just these 'people' who had embraced the Faith and had accepted the Holy Qur'ān as the word of Allah while it was being revealed. So, the verse indicates that the only kind of *'Iman* (faith) acceptable to Allah is the one which should be similar to that of the blessed Companions, and that the *'Īmān* of others would be worthy of the name only when they believe in the same things in the same way as the Companions did. In other words, the *'Īmān* of the Companions is a touchstone for testing the *'Īmān* of all the other Muslims; any belief or deed which departs from their faith and practice, however pleasing in its looks or good in its intention, is not valid according to the Sharī'ah. There is a consensus of commentators on this position. One should also notice that the hypocrites used to call the blessed Companions 'fools' (*Sufahā'*). This has always been the way of those who go astray - anyone who tries to show them the right path is, in their eyes, ignorant and stupid. But who could, the Holy Qur'ān points out, be more stupid than the man who refuses to see clear signs?

In the seventh verse, we see the double-facedness and trickery of the hypocrites. In the company of the Muslims, they would vociferously declare their faith in Islam; but, going back to their own

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5. As for the hypocrites declaring openly that they were not prepared to believe as others did believe, and as for their dubbing the Muslims as fools, it is obvious that they could have been so outspoken only before the poor among the Muslims, otherwise they used to be very careful about keeping their disbelief concealed.)

people, would reassure them that they had never left the way of their ancestors, and had been meeting the Muslims only to make fun of them.

The eighth verse is a comment on this attitude of complacency and self-congratulation on the part of the hypocrites. They are mightily pleased with themselves in the belief that they can so easily make a fool of the Muslims and get away with it, while they are, in fact, only making a fool of themselves. For Allah has, in His forbearance and mercy, given them a long rope, but this is a provision for their being thrown into ridicule. It took place like this. Since the hypocrites saw no apparent signs of divine punishment descending on themselves, they were encouraged in their complacency and rebellion, so that the cup of their iniquity was full, and one day they were caught. Allah acted like this in response to their mockery; so, the Holy Qur'ān describes this divine action too as a mockery on the part of Allah.

The ninth verse shows the basic denseness of the hypocrites - how they failed to make use of the ordinary sense of discrimination. They had grown up in a pagan society, and knew very well what the way of the infidels was. Now they had become familiar enough with Islam too, and could easily see the difference. But, in their greed, and for the sake of petty worldly profit, they still chose disbelief as against Islam, and bartered away something as invaluable as *'Īmān* (faith) for something as worthless, and even harmful as *kufr* (infidelity). In giving the name of 'trade' or 'commerce' to this action, the Holy Qur'ān suggests that these worldly-wise men had no understanding even of the art of trading.

The last four verses bring out the miserable plight of the hypocrites with the help of two extended similes. The choice of two examples is meant to divide the hypocrites into two kinds of men. On the one hand were those in whom disbelief had taken deep roots, so that they had little inclination towards Islam, but pretended to be Muslims for worldly motives - the Holy Qur'ān compares them to the man who, having found light, again loses it, and is left in darkness. On the other hand were those who did recognize the truth of Islam, and sometimes wished to be genuine Muslims, but worldly interests would not allow them to do so, and they remained in a perpetual state of

hesitation and doubt - they have been likened to the men caught in a thunderstorm who move forward a step or two when there is a flash of lightning, but, when it is over, again get stuck. In the course of these parables, the hypocrites have also been warned that they are not beyond the power of Allah, and that He can, as and when He likes, take away their sight and hearing, and even destroy them.

Injunctions and related considerations

(1) It has sometimes been debated as to whether the distinction between *Kufr* (infidelity or disbelief) and *Nifāq* (hypocrisy) still holds good even after the days of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. The correct position with regard to this question is this. At that time, there were two ways of identifying a hypocrite and declaring him to be one - either Allah Himself informed the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم through revelation that such and such a man was not a Muslim at heart but a hypocrite, or a man through some word or deed overtly repugnant to the Islamic creed or practice showed himself up as a hypocrite, thus providing a clear evidence against himself. Divine revelation having ceased with the departure of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم from this world, the first way of identifying a hypocrite is no longer available, but the second way is still valid. That is to say, if a man is found, on certain evidence, to be guilty, in word or deed, of rejecting or opposing or distorting or holding in scorn the basic doctrines of Islam undeniably established by the Holy Qur'ān, the *Ḥadīth* and *ijmā'* (consensus), he would be regarded as a *Munāfiq* (hypocrite) in spite of his claim to be a true Muslim. The Holy Qur'ān gives such a hypocrite the name of a *mulhid* or heretic- اَلَّذِيْنَ يُلْحِدُوْنَ فِيْٓ اٰيٰتِنَا : "Those who distort Our verses", 41:40), and the *Ḥadīth* calls him a *zindīq*. One must also add that since the *kufr* (infidelity) of such a man has been proved by clear and definite evidence, the *Sharī'ah* will not put him in a separate category, but deal with him as it would deal with any other *kāfir* (infidel). That is why the authentic scholars are unanimous in concluding that after the departure of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم the question of hypocrites ceased to be a relevant one - now anyone who is not a genuine Muslim will be regarded as *kāfir*. The famous author, *Al-'Ainī*, in his commentary on Al-Bukhārī, reports from Imām *Mālik* that after the days of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم this is the only available means of identifying 'hypocrisy', and that a man who carries this mark could be called a hypocrite.

(2) A little reflection on these verses would reveal the true nature of Islam and *'Īmān* (faith) and also that of *kufr* (disbelief), for the Holy Qur'an reports the claim of the hypocrites to be Muslims: اٰمَنَّا بِاللّٰهِ :"we believe in Allah", (2:8), forthwith refutes this claim: وَمَا هُمْ بِمُؤْمِنِيْنَ :"yet they are no believers". In order to understand fully the implications of these verses, one should bear in one's mind the fact that the hypocrites in question were actually Jews. Now, belief in Allah and in Hereafter is, no doubt, an essential part of their creed as well; what was not included in their creed, as defined by their religious scholars, was the belief in the prophethood of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم . In declaring their faith in Islam, the Jews very cleverly used to leave out the belief in the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and mention only two elements: belief in Allah and belief in the Hereafter. So far as such a declaration goes, they cannot be called liars, and yet the Holy Qur'ān refutes their claim to be Muslims, and regards them as liars. Why?

The fact is that, for one to be a Muslim, it is not sufficient merely to declare one's faith in Allah and the Hereafter in any form or manner which suits one's individual or collective fancy. As for that, associators of all kinds do, in one way or another, believe in Allah and consider Him to be Omnipotent[6] but the Holy Qur'ān does not allow any of these things to pass for *'Īmān* (faith). *'Īmān* or faith in Allah must, in order to be valid and worthy of the name, conform to what the Holy Qur'ān specifically lays down with regards to the divine names and attributes; similarly, belief in the Hereafter can be valid only when it is true to the specifications of the Holy Qur'ān and the *Ḥadīth*.[7]

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6. Even peoples described by the Westerners as "savages" or "primitives - though "degenerates" would be far closer to the mark - have at least a vague notion of a Supreme Deity, and ususally very vivid ideas about the other world.

7. There is no end to the making of books, and no end to the making of gods and to the naming of gods - above all, in our own day. Reason, Nature, Man, Life, all having served their turn and grown rusty, are being replaced by more fancy names - "the ground of being" of the so-called Christian Existentialism, the ultimate "archetype of the Collective Unconscious" of Jungian psychology, and what not. They have lately invented a goldless theology too.

In the light of this explanation one can see that the Jews who pretended to be Muslims believed neither in Allah nor in the Hereafter according to these definite requirements. For, on the one hand, they regarded the Prophet 'Uzair or Ezra عليه السلام as the son of God, and, on the other, cherished the fond belief that the progeny of the prophets, no matter how it acted, would always remain 'the chosen of God', and would not be called to account on the Day of Judgment, or at the worst receive only a token punishment. These being their beliefs, the Holy Qur'ān rightly rejects their claims to faith in Allah and the Hereafter.

(3) As we have already said, verse 13 defines what *'Īmān* (faith) really is: اٰمِنُوْا كَمَآ اٰمَنَ النَّاسُ :"Believe as other men have believed". In other words, the criterion for judging one's claim to *'Īmān* is the *'Īmān* of the blessed Companions of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, and any claim to *Iman* which does not conform to it is not acceptable to Allah and to the Holy Prophet ﷺ . If a man has the presumption[8] to interpret an Islamic doctrine or verse of the Holy Qur'ān in a way which departs from the explicit and clear explanation provided by the Holy Qur'ān itself or by the Holy Prophet ﷺ , his individual opinion and belief, no matter how much it titillates the palate of his contemporaries or feeds their fancy, will have no value or validity in the eyes of the *Sharī'ah*. For example, the *Qādiānīs* [9] claim that like Muslims they too believe in the doctrine of the Finality of the Prophethood of Muḥammad ﷺ, but in this respect they deviate from what the Holy Prophet ﷺ has himself stated, and what the Companions believed in, and distort the doctrine so as to make room for the prophethood of Mirza Ghulam Aḥmad of Qādian; so, according to the indication of the Holy Qur'ān, they come under this indictment: مَا هُمْ بِمُؤْمِنِيْنَ :"They are no believers."

In short, if a man interprets an Islamic doctrine in a way which is repugnant to the *'Īmān* of the blessed Companions, and yet claims to be a Muslim on the basis of his adherence to this doctrine and also performs his religious duties exactly like Muslims, he will not be considered a *Mu'min* (true Muslim) until and unless he agrees to conform to the criterion of *'Īmān* laid down by the Holy Qur'ān.

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8. As is all too common these days.

9. Who style themselves as Ahmadis.

Removal of a doubt

We may also dispel a misunderstanding which often arises - and is more often made to arise with an ulterior motive - with regard to the famous dictum in the *Ḥadīth* and *Fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence) that the 'people of the Ka'bah' (*Ahl al-Qiblah*), that is, those who turn towards the Ka'bah in offering prescribed *Salah* cannot be branded as infidels. The verse under discussion clearly defines the meaning of the phrase, *Ahl al-Qiblah*. The term pertains only to those who do not deny any of the basic essential doctrines and commandments of Islam which are called the *Darūriāt* (essentials). For that matter even the hypocrites mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān used to offer their prayers exactly as the Muslims did; but turning towards Ka'bah while praying was not taken to be sufficient to make them acceptable as true Muslims, simply because they did not have faith in all the essentials of Islam as the blessed Companions did.

Lying is contemptible

(4) The verse اٰمَنَّا بِاللّٰهِ وَبِالْيَوْمِ الْاٰخِرِ :"We believe in Allah and in the Last Day" shows us how disgusting it is to tell a lie - even the hypocrites, with all their hostility to Islam, tried to refrain from it as far as possible. In claiming to be Muslims, they used to mention only their faith in Allah and in the Day of Judgment, but left out the faith in the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم for fear of telling a lie.

Misbehaving Prophets is to misbehave with Allah

(5) These verses denounce the hypocrites for trying to be clever with Allah Himself and to deceive Him, although no one among them could probably have had such an intention or even thought of such a possibility. What they were actually doing was to try to deceive the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the Muslims. Allah has equated this effort with an attempt to deceive Him, and has thus indicated that a man who is in any way impertinent to a prophet or a man of Allah is ultimately guilty of being impertinent to Allah Himself - this should be true above all in the case of the Holy Prophet ﷺ who stands in his station at the head of all created beings.

The curse of telling lies

(6) There is another subtle and very significant point here. According to these verses, the hypocrites would meet with a grievous

punishment for having told lies. Now, their greatest crime was disbelief and hypocrisy in matters of faith, and they had been committing other crimes as well, like nursing envy and malice against Muslims in their hearts and actually conspiring against them. And yet here the grievous punishment has been connected with their habit of telling lies. This is an indication that basically this nefarious habit was their real crime, which gradually led them to hypocrisy and disbelief. In other words, although hypocrisy and disbelief are much greater crimes, yet they arise from the habit of telling lies. That is why the Holy Qur'ān combines the sin of lying with the sin of idol worship in the same phrase:

فَاجْتَنِبُوا الرِّجْسَ مِنَ الْأَوْثَانِ وَاجْتَنِبُوا قَوْلَ الزُّورِ ۝

"Guard yourselves against the filth of idols and against telling lies" (22:30)

Who are reformers and mischief-makers

(7) As these verses report, when the hypocrites were asked not to spread disorder in the land through their prevarication and double dealing, they used to reply emphatically: إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُونَ :"We are nothing but reformers." The word *Innamā* (nothing but), used in the Arabic text, indicates not merely emphasis but exclusivity. So, their reply would mean that they were nothing but reformers, the servants of order, and that their activities could have nothing to do with disorder. Commenting on their reply, the Holy Qur'ān says:

أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْمُفْسِدُونَ وَلَٰكِن لَّا يَشْعُرُونَ ۝

"Beware, it is, in fact, they who spread disorder, but they are not aware."

Now, we learn two things from this comment. Firstly, the activities of the hypocrites did actually produce disorder in the land. Secondly, they did not indulge in these activities with the express intention or design of creating disorder - they were not even aware of the possibility that their actions could be the cause of disorder. For, among the things which spread disorder in the world, there are some which are commonly recognized to be mischievous and disorderly activities, and hence every sensible and conscientious man refrains from them e.g., theft, robbery, murder, rape etc.; on the other hand, there are some which in their external aspect do not appear to be mischief or

disorder, but, working unseen, they have the necessary consequence of destroying the morals of men which, in its turn, opens the door to all kinds of disorder.

This is exactly what the hypocrites were doing. No doubt, they refrained from theft, robbery etc.; it was on this count that they denied their being mischievous, and emphatically asserted that they were serving the cause of order. But all this while they had been freely giving vent to their malice and envy by conspiring with the enemies of the Muslims. These are things which finally bring man down to the level of beasts. Once he has lost his awareness of ethical values and human decency, even an average man becomes an agent of social disorder - of a disorder much greater than that released by thieves or robbers, or even beasts are capable of producing. For, the mischief of robbers and beasts can be controlled by the physical power of law and government. But laws are made and enforced by men. What happens to laws, when man has ceased to be man, can easily be witnessed all around us in the world of today. Everyone takes it for granted that humanity is on the march and the modern man is so far the ultimate in civilization; the network of educational institutions covers every hamlet on the face of the earth; legislative bodies keep buzzing night and day; organizations for the promulgation of laws spend billions, and circumlocution offices proliferate. And yet crime and disorder keep in step with the march of civilization. The reason is simple.

Law is not an automatic machine; it requires men to make it work. If man ceases to be man, neither laws nor bureaucratic agencies can provide a remedy for the all-pervading disorder. It is for this that the greatest benefactor of mankind, the Holy Prophet ﷺ, concentrated all his attention on making men real men - in all the plenitude of the term. Once this has been achieved, crime or disorder comes to an end of itself without the help of enormous police forces and extensive system of law-courts. As long as people acted upon his teachings in certain parts of the world, man saw a kind of peace and order prevail the like of which had never been witnessed before nor is likely to be witnessed when these teachings are abandoned or disregarded.

In so far as actual practice is concerned, the essence of the

teachings of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is fear of Allah and solicitude for the assessment of one's deeds on the Day of Judgment. If these are absent, no constitution or legal code, nor administrative body or university can force or induce man to keep away from crime. Those who run the world in our day invent ever-new administrative measures to prevent crime, but they not only neglect the very soul of administration, the fear of Allah, but even deploy the means of destroying it - all of which has the necessary consequence that the remedy only helps to feed the malady.

To another aspect of the question, it is easy enough to find a cure for thieves and robbers and for all those who create disorder openly. But the miscreants who have been described in these verses always appear in the garb of reformers, brandishing colourful schemes of social amelioration which are only a mask for personal interests, and for raising the slogan, إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُونَ :"We are nothing but reformers." Hence it is that Allah, while asking men not to spread disorder on the earth, has also said in another place:

وَاللّٰهُ يَعْلَمُ الْمُفْسِدَ مِنَ الْمُصْلِحِ ط

"And Allah knows the one who makes mischief distinct from him who promotes good." (2:220)

This is an indication that Allah alone[10] knows the states of men's hearts and their intentions, and He alone knows the nature and consequences of each human deed as to whether it would help the cause of order or of disorder. So, to serve the cause of order, it is not sufficient merely to possess such an intention; much more essential than that is to orient oneself in thought and deed in harmony with the *Sharī'ah*, for an action may, in spite of the best intentions, sometimes result in mischief and disorder, if it is not guided by the *Sharī'ah*.

Verses 21-22

يٰٓاَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوْا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِىْ خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِيْنَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُوْنَ ۝ اَلَّذِىْ جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْاَرْضَ فِرَاشًا وَّالسَّمَآءَ

10. Can distinguish between order and disorder, for He alone.

بِنَآءً وَّاَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَآءِ مَآءً فَاَخْرَجَ بِهٖ مِنَ الثَّمَرٰتِ رِزْقًا لَّكُمْ
فَلَا تَجْعَلُوْا لِلّٰهِ اَنْدَادًا وَّ اَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُوْنَ ۝

O men, worship your Lord - who created you and those before you, so that you may become God-fearing - who made the earth a bed for you and the sky a roof, and sent down water from the sky, then through it brought forth, out of fruits, provision for you. So, do not set up parallels to Allah when you know. (Verses 21-22)

A review of verses linked together

The second verse of the Sūrah 'Al-Baqarah' provides the answer to the prayer made in the Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah, اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيْمَ:"Guide us in the straight path"- that is to say, the guidance man has prayed for is present in this book, for the Holy Qur'ān is from the beginning to the end a detailed account of the straight path. Then, the Surah proceeds to divide men into three groups according to whether they accept the guidance of the Holy Qur'ān or not. Three verses speak of the true and God-fearing Muslims, who not only accept but also act upon the guidance, and the next two verses of those disbelievers who oppose it openly.

Then come thirteen verses dealing with the hypocrites who are hostile to this guidance, but, for the sake of petty worldly interests or in seeking to harm the Muslims, try to keep their disbelief concealed and to present themselves as Muslims. Thus, the first twenty verses of the Surah, in dividing men into three groups on the basis of their acceptance or rejection of the guidance, indicate that the proper criterion for dividing men into groups is neither race or colour, nor language nor geography, but religion. Hence those, who believe in Allah and follow the guidance He has provided in the Holy Qur'ān, form one nation, and those who disbelieve form a different nation - the Holy Qur'ān calls the former the 'party of Allah' and the latter - 'the party of Satan' (58:19-22)

Then, the present verses (21 and 22), addressing the three groups together, present the message for which the Holy Qur'ān has been revealed. In asking men to give up the worship of created beings and to worship Allah alone, they adopt a mode of expression which not only

makes an affirmation but also supports it with arguments so clear that even an average man, only if he uses his common sense, cannot help being convinced of the Oneness of God.

Commentary :

In starting the address, verse 21 uses the Arabic word *An-nās*, which signifies man in general, or man as such - so, the word covers all the three groups we have just mentioned. And the message delivered by the verse is: اُعْبُدُوْا رَبَّكُمُ : "Worship your Lord." The Arabic word *'Ibādah* (worship) connotes expending all energies one has in total obedience to somebody, and shunning all disobedience out of one's awe and reverence. (Rūh-al-Bayān) We have earlier explained the meaning of the word *Rabb* (one who gives nurture). Let us add that the choice of this particular name from among the Beautiful names of Allah is very meaningful in the present context, for the affirmation has thus been combined with the argument in a very short sentence. The word *Rabb* indicates that only He is, or can be, worthy of being worshipped, He is the final and absolute Cause of nurturing man - Who changes man through gradual stages of development from a drop of water into healthy, sentient and rational being, and Who provides the means for his sustenance and growth. This truth is so obvious that even an ignorant or intellectually dull man would, on a little reflection, not fail to see and admit that such a power of nurturing can belong only to Allah, and not to a created being. What can a creature do for man, when it owes its very existence to the Creator? Can a needy one come to the help of another? And if it appears to be doing so, the act of nurturing must in reality and ultimately belong to the One Being on whom both have to depend in order to exist at all. So, who else but the *Rabb* can be worthy of adoration and worship?

The sentence is addressed to all the three groups of men, and for each it has a different meaning. "Worship your Lord": the phrase calls upon the disbelievers to give up worshipping created beings and to turn to the Creator; it asks the hypocrites to be sincere and true in their faith; it commands the sinning Muslims to change their ways and try to be perfect in their obedience to Allah; and it encourages the God-fearing Muslims to be steadfast in their worship and obedience, and to make a greater effort in the way of Allah (Rūh-al-Bayān).

The two verses proceed to enlarge upon the theme by specifying certain special qualities of the *Rabb*: اَلَّذِیْ خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِیْنَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ :"Who created you and those before you." This is a quality which one cannot even imagine to belong to a created being, for it can pertain only to the Creator - that is, the quality of giving existence to what did not exist before, and of producing from the darkness and filth of the mother's womb a creature as lovely and noble as man.

In adding to the phrase: اَلَّذِیْ خَلَقَكُمْ :"who created you" the words, وَالَّذِیْنَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ "and those before you," the verse shows that Allah alone is the Creator of all mankind. It is also significant that the verse mentions only "those before you" and not "those who will come after you", and through this omission suggests that there will not be any *Ummah* (a traditional community formed by all the followers of a prophet) to succeed the *Ummah* of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, for no prophet will be sent down after the Last Prophet ﷺ, and hence no new *'Ummah'* will arise.

The final phrase of verse 21 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُوْنَ has been translated here as "so that you may become God-fearing". It may also be translated to mean "So that you may save yourselves from hell", or "So that you may guard yourselves against evil." But the point is that one can hope to attain salvation and paradise only when one worships Allah alone, and does not associate anyone else with Him.

Before we proceed, we must clarify a very important doctrinal point. The phrase (لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُوْنَ) which has been translated here as "so that you may become God-fearing" employs the Arabic particle *l'alla* which indicates an expectation or hope, and is used on an occasion when it is not definite that a certain action or event would necessarily be actualized. Now, if one does really possess *'Īmān* (faith) and does really believe in *Tauḥīd*, one would, in consequence definitely attain salvation and go to Heaven, as Allah Himself has promised. But here the certainty has been expressed in terms of an expectation or hope in order to make man realize that no human action by itself and in itself can bring salvation as a necessary reward. One can attain salvation and go to Heaven only by the grace of Allah alone. The ablility to perform good deeds, and *'Īmān* itself is only a sign of divine grace, not the cause.

The next verse recounts some other qualities of Allah with regard to the act of nurturing, with the difference that while verse 21 spoke of the bounties of Allah pertaining to the human self, verse 22 speaks of those pertaining to man's physical environment. Since man's being basically has two dimensions, one internal (*Anfus*) and the other external (*Āfāq*), the two verses, in a summary way, encompass all the kinds of blessings that descend on man from Allah.

Among the cosmic bounties, the first to be mentioned is the earth which has been made a bed for man. It is neither soft and fluid like water on which one cannot settle, nor hard like stone or steel that should make it difficult to be harnessed for man's purposes, but has been given a middle state between the soft and the hard for man to utilize it conveniently in his daily life. The Arabic word, *Firāsh* (bed), which literally means 'somethings spread out', does not necessarily imply that the earth is not round, for the great globe of the earth, in spite of being round, appears to be flat to the onlooker, and the usual way of the Holy Qur'ān is to describe things in an aspect which should be familiar to an average man, literate or illiterate, city dweller or rustic.

The other bounty is that the sky has been made like an ornamented and beautiful ceiling. The third is that Allah sent down water from the sky. This, again, does not necessarily mean that water comes down directly from the sky without the medium of clouds - even in everyday idiom, a thing coming down from above is said to be coming from the sky. The Holy Qur'ān itself, on several occasions, refers to Allah sending down water from the clouds:

ءَ أَنتُمْ أَنزَلْتُمُوهُ مِنَ الْمُزْنِ أَمْ نَحْنُ الْمُنزِلُونَ ۝

"Did you send it down from the clouds, or did We send it?" (56:69)

وَأَنزَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُعْصِرَاتِ مَاءً ثَجَّاجًا

"And have sent down from the rain-clouds abundant water." (78:14)

The fourth bounty is to bring forth fruits with this water, and to provide nourishment to man from them.

The first three of these bounties are of an order in which man's effort or action, his very being even, does not enter at all. There was no

sign of man when the earth and the sky already existed, and clouds and rain too were performing their functions. As for these things, not even an ignorant fool could ever fancy that all this could be the work of a man or an idol, or of a created being. In the case of producing fruits and making them serve as nourishment for man, however, a simpleton may, on a superficial view, attribute this to human effort and ingenuity, for one can see man digging the earth, sowing the seed and protecting the plants. But the Holy Qur'ān has, in certain verses, made it quite clear that human effort has nothing to do with the act of growing trees and bringing out fruits, for human activity accomplishes nothing more than removing the hindrances to the birth and growth of a plant, or protecting it from being destroyed. Even the water which feeds the plant is not the creation of the farmer - all he does is to make the water reach the plant at the proper time in a proper quantity. The actual birth and growth of the tree, and the putting forth of leaves, branches and fruits is the work of Divine Power, and of no one else. Says the Holy Qur'ān :

أَفَرَءَيْتُم مَّا تَحْرُثُونَ ۝ ءَأَنتُمْ تَزْرَعُونَهُۥٓ أَمْ نَحْنُ ٱلزَّٰرِعُونَ

"Have you considered the soil you till? Is it you that give them growth or We ? " (56:63)

The only answer which man can find to this question posed by the Holy Qur'ān is that undoubtedly it is Allah alone who makes the plants grow.

In short, this verse mentions four qualities of Allah which cannot possibly be found in a created being. Having learnt from these two verses that it is Allah, and no one else, who brings man into existence out of nothingness, and provides the means of his sustenance through the earth, the sky, the rains and the fruits, one cannot, if one possesses a little common sense, help acknowledging that Allah, and no one else, is worthy of all worship and obedience, and that the ultimate iniquity is to turn away from Him who made man exist and gave him the means of survival and growth, and to prostrate oneself before others who are as helpless as man. Allah has put man at the head of all His creatures so that the universe should serve him, while he should totally devote himself to the worship and remembrance of Allah and obedience to Him without distraction. But there are men so

given to their indolence and ignorance that they forget the One God, and in consequence, have to serve a billion gods.

In order to rescue men from this slavery to others, the Holy Qur'ān says at the end of this verse:

فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا لِلّٰهِ اَنْدَادًا وَّاَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُوْنَ ۝

"So, do not set up parallels to Allah when you know."

That is to say, once one has understood that, in reality, Allah alone is the Creator and the Provider, one will have also understood that no one else can be worthy of worship and of being associated with Allah as an equal or rival god.

To sum up, these two verses call men to what is the essential purpose of sending down all the Divine Books and all the prophets - *Tauḥīd*, or the affirmation and the worship of the one God.

Tauḥīd is a doctrine which has an all-pervading and radically transforming impact on every sphere of human life, internal as well as external, individual as well as collective. For, once a man comes to believe that there is only One Being who alone is the Creator, the Lord and Master of the universe, who alone is all-powerful and ordains the slightest movement of the smallest atom, and without whose will no one can harm or do good to another - such a man, rich or poor, in joy or sorrow, would always look only towards that One Being, and gain the insight to discover behind the veil of apparent causes the workings of the same Omnipotence.

If our modern worshippers of 'energy' only had some understanding of the doctrine of *Tauḥīd*, they would easily see that power resides neither in steam nor in electricity, but that the source of all powers is the One Being who has created steam and electricity. To know this, however, one must have insight. The greatest philosopher in the world, if he fails to see this truth, is no better than the rustic fool who saw a railway-train move at the waving of a green flag and stop at the waving of a red flag, and concluding that it was the power of the green and red flags that controlled the movement of the huge train, made an obeisance to them. People would laugh at the rustic, for he did not know that the two flags are merely signs, while the train is actually run by the driver, or, better still, by the engine. A more

perceptive observer would ascribe the function to the steam inside the engine. But he who believes in the One God would laugh at all these wise men, for he can see through the steam, the fire and the water even, and discover behind the appearances the might of the One and Only Being who has created fire and water, and whose will makes them perform their allotted functions.

The Doctrine Of *Tauḥīd* : A source of peace in human life

Tauḥīd, the most fundamental doctrine of Islam, is not a mere theory, but the only effective way of making man a man in the real sense of the term - it is his first and last refuge and the panacea for all his ills. For the essence of this doctrine is that every possible change in the physical universe, its very birth and death is subject to the will of the One and Only Being, and a manifestation of His wisdom. When this doctrine takes hold of a man's mind and heart, and becomes his permanent state, all dissension ceases to exist and the world itself changes into a paradise for him, as he knows that the enmity of the foe and the love of the friend equally proceed from Allah who rules over the hearts of both. Such a man lives his life in perfect peace, fearing none and expecting nothing from anyone: shower him with gold, or put him in irons, he would remain unmoved, for he knows where it comes from.

This is the significance of the basic declaration of the Islamic creed, or لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ (there is no God but Allah). But, obviously, it is not enough to affirm the Oneness of God orally; one must have a complete certitude, and must also have the truth always present close to one's heart, for *Tauḥīd* is to see God as one, and not merely to say that He is one. Today, the number of those who can respect this basic formula of the Islamic creed runs to millions all over the world - far more than it ever did, but mostly it is just an expense of breath: their lives do not show the colour of *Tauḥīd*; or otherwise, they should have been like their forefathers who were daunted neither by wealth nor by power, awed neither by numbers nor by pomp and show to turn their back upon the Truth - when a prophet could all by himself stand up against the world, and say: ثُمَّ كِيدُونِ فَلَا تُنظِرُونِ :"So try your guile on me, then give me no respite" (17:195). If the blessed Companions and their successors came to dominate the world in a few years, the secret lay in

this *Tauḥīd*, correctly understood and practised. May Allah bless all the Muslims with this great gift!

Verses 23-24

وَاِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِىْ رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلٰى عَبْدِنَا فَاْتُوْا بِسُوْرَةٍ مِّنْ مِّثْلِهٖ وَادْعُوْا شُهَدَآءَكُمْ مِّنْ دُوْنِ اللّٰهِ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ صٰدِقِيْنَ ۝ فَاِنْ لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوْا وَلَنْ تَفْعَلُوْا فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِىْ وَقُوْدُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ اُعِدَّتْ لِلْكٰفِرِيْنَ ۝

And if you are in doubt as to that which we have revealed to Our servant, then bring a Sūrah the like of this, and do call your supporters other than Allah, if you are true. But if you do not - and you never shall - then guard yourselves against the fire, the fuel of which are men and stones. It has been prepared for disbelievers. (Verses 23-24)

The Guidance which the Holy Qur'ān provides to man rests on two basic principles - *Tauḥīd* (the Oneness of God) and *Risalah* (Prophethood). The two preceding verses (21 and 22) affirm the Oneness of God in presenting certain acts peculiar to Allah alone as a proof; these two verses (23 and 24) affirm the prophethood of Muḥammad ﷺ in presenting the word of Allah as a proof. In both the places, the mode of argument is the same. The preceding verses mention certain things which no one could or can do except Allah - for example, creating the sky and the earth, sending down water from the sky, bringing forth fruits with water; and the point of the argument is that since no one except Allah can do these things, no one else can be worthy of being worshipped. These two verses refer to a kind of speech which cannot possibly come from anyone except Allah, and the like of which no human being can ever produce just as the helplessness of man and other creatures in the matter of creating the sky and the earth etc. is a demonstration of the fact that these are the acts of Allah alone, in the same way the helplessness of all created beings in the matter of producing something equal to or resembling the Word of Allah is a demonstration of the fact that this is the Word of Allah alone. Here the Holy Qur'ān challenges all men the world over, those of the

present and those of the future, to produce even a small passage like this, if they suppose it to be the work of a man, for other men may also be capable of accomplishing what one man has achieved. In case individuals should fail in such an effort, the Holy Qur'ān allows them the facility of calling to their aid all possible helpers - they could even hold an international 'workshop' for the purpose. The next verse forewarns them that such a venture would never succeed, and threatens with the fires of hell, for having once acknowledged his inability to produce something to equal the Holy Qur'ān, which is a clear evidence of its being the word, not of man but of a Being who stands above all created things, if a man still persists in his disbelief, he is only seeking a place in hell. The Holy Qur'ān asks men to beware of such a fate.

The Miraculous Qur'ān is a prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ

Thus, the verses, in emphasizing the miraculous character of the Holy Qur'ān, present it as the evidence of the prophethood of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم and of his truth. No doubt, the miracles of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم are innumerable, each more marvellous than the other, but in mentioning only one of these here - one that pertains to the sphere of knowledge, namely, the Holy Qur'ān - Allah has pointed out that this is the greatest. Even among the miracles of all the prophets عليهم السلام this particular miracle has a special distinction. It has been the way of Allah to show His omnipotence by manifesting some miracles through each prophet or messenger. But each miracle appears with a certain prophet, and ends with him. The Holy Qur'ān, on the contrary, is a miracle which is to survive till the end of time.

As for the phrase : وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ :"And if you are in doubt," we may remark that the verse employs the Arabic word, *raib* for 'doubt'. According to Imam Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *raib* signifies a kind of hesitation or indecision or suspicion which has no basis, and can therefore be easily overcome with the help of a little reflection. That is why the Holy Qur'ān says that having this kind of doubt (*raib*) is not consistent with being a man of knowledge, even if he were not a Muslim:

وَلَا يَرْتَابَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتٰبَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ

"So that the people of the Book and Muslims should have no doubt". (74:31)

Similarly, at the very beginning of the Sūrah Al-Baqarah the Holy Qur'ān refers to itself as the Book لَارَيْبَ فِيهِ :"In which there is no doubt (*raib*)." In the present verse again it uses the word *raib* to say: وَإِنْ كُنتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ :"if you are in doubt", the implication being that the truths enunciated by the Holy Qur'ān are so clear and evident that there is no room for any hesitation or indecision or suspicion to arise except for those who do not possess knowledge.

As for the people who hesitate in accepting the Holy Qur'ān as the Word of Allah, and suspect that it is the work of the Holy Prophet ﷺ or of some other man, the verse proposes an easy test - they should produce a passage (a Sūrah) resembling or equalling the Holy Qur'an in order to substantiate their claim; but if they fail, they should finally acknowledge the Holy Qur'an to be undoubtedly the Word of Allah. The Arabic word "*Sūrah*" means a "limited or definite piece"; as a technical term, a *Sūrah* is a passage of the Holy Qur'ān which has been set apart from other passages by Divine Commandment (*Waḥy*), there being 114 *Sūrahs* in the Holy Qur'ān, some long and others very short. The present verse uses the word *Sūrah* without the definite article "*Al*", and hence includes the shortest of the Sūrahs in the challenge thrown out to the doubters.

At this point, the objection can arise that the failure of one man or one group of men does not necessarily argue the inability of another man or group in the matter. The Holy Qur'ān meets this objection by declaring:

وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُم مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

"And do call your supporters other than Allah, if you are true".

The Arabic word used here is *Shuhadā'*, the plural or *Shāhid* which signifies 'one who is present'- a witness is called a *Shāhid*, for he has to be present in the court of law. In this verse, the word *Shuhadā'* refers either to men in general - implying that the doubters could call to their aid any men whatsoever from anywhere in the world -, or specifically to the idols of the disbelievers of Makkah who thought that these blocks of stone would appear on the Day of Judgment as witnesses in their favour.

The next verse foretells that the doubters shall never succeed, even

if they tried with all their individual or collective might, in producing a passage which could resemble the Holy Qur'ān. If they should still persist in their denial, the verse threatens them with the fire of Hell, which has already been prepared for such stubborn disbelievers.

The infidels of Makkah, history tells us, were ready to give up their very lives for the purpose of obliterating Islam. In throwing out to them this challenge, the Holy Qur'ān gave them an easy chance of accomplishing their purpose, and even hurt their tribal sense of honour by predicting that they would never be able to take up the challenge. And yet not a single contender came up for the trial, which was a clear admission of their helplessness and an acknowledgment of the Holy Qur'ān being the Word of Allah. This fact establishes the Holy Qur'ān as the evident miracle of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Since the challenge still stands, the miracle too lives on, and shall live to the end of the world.

The Holy Qur'ān: A living miracle

As for the Holy Qur'ān being a miracle, the subject has been thoroughly discussed in scores of books by the greatest scholars in all the ages and in different languages. We may mention a few outstanding ones: *Naẓm al-Qur'ān* by *al-Jāhiz*, written in the 3rd century A.H.; *'I'jāz al-Qur'ān'* by Abū 'Abdullāh Wāsiṭi, written early in the 4th century; a small book, 'I'jāz al-Qur'ān' by Ibn 'Īsā Rabbāni, written later in the 4th century; a long and comprehensive book, 'I'jāz al-Qur'ān' by Qādi Abū Bakr Bāqillāni, written early in the 5th century; the subject has also been discussed at length in well-known books like 'Al-Itqan' by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūti, 'Al-Khasā'is al-Kubra' by the same author, 'At-Tafsīr al-Kabir' by Imām Rāzi, and 'Ash-Shifa' by Qādi 'Iyad; more recently still, 'I'jāz al-Qur'ān', by Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i', and 'Al-Waḥy al-Muḥammadi' by Sayyid Rashīd Riḍā; and finally 'I'jāz al-Qur'ān' by Shabbir Aḥmad Uthmāni. We may, in passing, draw attention to another peculiar quality of the Holy Qur'ān that, beside comprehensive and voluminous commentaries, scores of books have been written on different aspects of the Book of Allah and on the innumerable considerations which arise from it.

We cannot provide even a brief resume of all that has been written

on the subject, the literature being so vast. We shall, however, give a few brief indications as to why the Holy Qur'ān is held to be a miracle of the Prophet of Islam: صلى الله عليه وسلم

Qualities that make the Qur'an a miracle

(1) The Holy Qur'ān is incomparable for its comprehensiveness even among the Sacred Books of the world; on the one hand, it brings to man the ultimate knowledge of a metaphysical order, and, on the other, provides guidance for all the spheres of human life, spiritual or physical, individual or collective. Those who suspect the Book to have been the product of a human agency should remind themselves of the simple fact that it appeared at a time and in a place which offered no facilities for acquiring the kind of education which is necessary for composing such a book - in fact, the Arabs were in those days known as the *Ummiyyūn*, 'the illiterates', and that the Book came through the Holy Prophet ﷺ who could not even read or write, and who had not tried to learn even the arts of poetry and rhetoric on which the Arabs prided themselves. This fact, in itself, is nothing short of a miracle.

(2) The Holy Qur'ān is, no doubt, a guidance for all men without any distinction of time or place, but the first to be addressed were the Arabs of the Age of Ignorance. In affirming that no human being could produce even a few verses comparable to its own, the Holy Qur'ān did not confine the challenge merely to the richness of meaning and the quality of wisdom, but included the mode of expression as well. Now, the 'illiterates' of Arabia had no pretensions to wisdom or knowledge, but they certainly fancied themselves for their eloquence - to them, the aliens were just 'The Dumb' (*Al-'Ajam)*. And some of them were so mad in their hostility to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that, if they could see a chance of hurting him in doing so, they would readily have slit their own throats out of sheer spite. And yet no one came forward to accept the challenge. This helplessness in a contest which should have been easy for a people so gifted with a spontaneous eloquence - does it not argue that the Holy Qur'ān is not the word of man, but the Word of Allah? As a matter of fact, the most discriminating among the contemporary Arabs did admit, though in private, that the Holy Qur'ān was inimitable; some of them had the honesty to say so in public and some accepted Islam, while others in spite of this

admission, could not give up the ways of their forefathers, or sufficiently overcome tribal rivalries, particularly their hostility to Banū 'Abd Munāf, the tribe of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم to embrace Islam.

Jalāl al-Din al-Suyūti has, in his 'Al-Khasā'is al-Kubrā', reported a number of incidents which illustrate the point. When the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the Holy Qur'ān began to attract the attention of people even outside Makkah, the enemies of Islam became worried about the huge crowds that would assemble there for the annual pilgrimage and would be likely to fall under his spell. Their tribal chiefs wanted to find an effective strategem to prevent such a situation from arising, and they referred the problem to Walīd ibn Mughīrah, the eldest and the wisest among them. To begin with, they suggested that they could tell the pilgrims that the Holy Qur'ān was (May Allah forgive us for reporting a blasphemy) only the ravings of a lunatic. But Walīd could foresee that when the pilgrims heard the Holy Prophet ﷺ speaking with such lucidity and eloquence, they would immediately know that the allegation was not true. Next they thought of dismissing him as a mere poet. But Walid warned them that, an understanding of the arts of poetry being innate in most Arabs, the pilgrims would easily see that he was no poet. Then, they considered the possibility of putting him down as one of the soothsayers. But Walīd feared that they would again discover how false the imputation was, and would only turn against the accusers. In summing up his own impression of the Holy Qur'ān, he said: "By God, there is not a single man among you who knows more about Arabic poetry than me. And, by God, I find in this speech a kind of sweetness and grace which I have never found in the speech of any poet or of any eloquent man." After a good deal of thought, he finally advised them to accuse the Holy Prophet ﷺ of being a sorcerer who employed his black art in separating sons from fathers, and wives from husbands.

Exactly the same was the impression made by the Holy Qur'ān on many other people, who expressed similar views - for example, Nadr ibn Ḥārith, a tribal chief; Unais, the brother of the blessed Companion, Abū Dharr; As'ad ibn Zurārah, another tribal chief, and Qais ibn Nasībah of the Banū Sulaim tribe. Even the vilest enemies of the Holy

Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم like Akhnas ibn Shariq, Abu Sufyān and, of all persons, Abu Jahl himself are reported to have stealthily crept in the darkness of night to the house of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم to hear him reciting the Holy Qur'ān, and to have been so entranced by the Word of Allah that they could not tear themselves away from the place till it was dawn. Yet they continued to be stubborn in their denial, for, as Abū Jahl confessed in so many words, they had been successfully vying with the tribe of Banū 'Abd Munāf in all possible virtues, but now that their rivals had produced a prophet, they could not come up with something to match the claim.

In short, the Arabs failed to take up the challenge of the Holy Qur'ān, and admitted their helplessness; nor has any one else succeeded in the attempt since then - all of which goes to show that the Holy Qur'ān can only be the Word of Allah, not of man.

(3) The Holy Qur'ān made many predictions about future events, and things turned out to be exactly as it had declared. For example, the infidels of Makkah were not prepared to believe the prophecy that the people of Rum, or the *Byzantians*, would finally rout the Persians after having suffered an initial defeat. The infidels made it a point of honour, and put a wager on it, but were humiliated to see the prophecy come true before the stipulated period of ten years was over.

(4) The Holy Qur'ān gives a clear account of some of the earlier prophets, of their Sharī'ah and of their peoples, and of many historical events since the beginning of the world. Even the best scholars among the Jews and the Christians did not possess such exact information. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم , who had never attended a school nor been in the company of a learned man, could not have provided all these details for himself without having received the knowledge from Allah.

(5) Several verses of the Holy Qur'ān disclosed what certain people had tried to keep concealed in their hearts, and they had to confess that this was just what they had been thinking. We shall cite only two instances.

إِذْ هَمَّت طَّآئِفَتَانِ مِنكُمْ أَن تَفْشَلَا

"When two of your battalions thought of falling away. . ." (3:122)

and ,

يَقُوْلُوْنَ فِيْٓ اَنْفُسِهِمْ لَوْلَا يُعَذِّبُنَا اللّٰهُ بِمَا نَقُوْلُ

"They say in their hearts, 'Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?'

(6) The Holy Qur'ān predicted that such and such men would not be able to do such and such things, and then it turned out that, in spite of having the power, they could not do these things. The Jews claimed to be the 'Chosen of God' and His friends. Since one is always eager to meet one's friends, the Holy Qur'ān asked them to substantiate their claim by wishing for death and for going back to Allah, but at the same time declared: وَلَنْ يَّتَمَنَّوْهُ اَبَدًا :"And they shall never wish for it" (62:7). Now, expressing a wish for death should not be difficult for anyone, if he wishes to establish his *bonafides*; for the Jews in particular, it would have been an easy way of refuting the Holy Qur'an. But, in spite of all their hatred for the Holy Prophet ﷺ, they knew in their hearts that the Holy Qur'ān was the Book of Allah, and feared that if they told a lie in this matter, they would actually die. And they kept quiet.

(7) When the Holy Qur'ān is recited (in Arabic, of course), it affects in a strange and indefinable way the heart of even a casual listener, Muslim or non-Muslim. History reports many instances of people accepting Islam merely because they happened to be passing by when the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was reciting the Holy Qur'ān - such was the case, for example, of the blessed Companion Jubair ibn Muṭ'im.

(8) The best book in the world, if read four or five times, begins to lose its charm even for the most fervent admirer. But the peculiar quality of the Holy Qur'ān, and of it alone, is that the more one reads or recites it, the more eager one becomes to do so again and again. Even among the sacred books of the world, the Holy Qur'ān is unique in this respect.

(9) The sacred books of many religions have been lost or no longer exist in an integral and authentic form. But Allah has promised in the Holy Qur'ān that He Himself will protect this Book, and preserve it against the slightest change upto the end of time. During the fourteen

centuries of the history of Islam, millions of copies, written by hand or printed, have been spread all over the globe as no other sacred book has been. But in this respect the greatest miracle of the Holy Qur'ān is that in all the ages and in all the places where Muslims have lived, there have been millions of people who have known the Book by heart without the alteration of a single consonant or vowel. So, Allah has preserved His Last Book not merely in the shape of written words, but, above all in the hearts of men. Allah is Ever-Living, so will His Word live for ever beyond the interference of created beings.

(10) There is no other book which should comprehend all the forms of knowledge and wisdom in so short a space as does the Holy Qur'ān, fulfilling all possible spiritual needs of man, and providing him with guidance for all the spheres of his internal or external, individual or social activity.

(11) It is not merely a theoretical guidance that the Holy Qur'ān has offered. Which other book, sacred or otherwise, has had such a vast and deep impact on the history of mankind in such a short time? Which other book has brought about such a radical change in the individual and collective life of millions of men within the space of a few years ? For when the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم departed from this world, Islam had, in spite of all opposition and without the modern media of communication, already established a new order of life all over the Arabian peninsula, and within the next few decades the message of the Holy Qur'ān had reached India on one side, and Spain on the other. Can such pervasiveness be anything but a miracle?

Answers to some doubts

Before we leave the subject, we may also deal with certain doubts which have been expressed with regard to the miraculous nature of the Holy Qur'ān. It has, for example, been suggested that some people, at one time or another, must have taken up the challenge of the Holy Qur'ān, and produced something comparable to it, but their compositions have not been preserved and have not come down to us. But the objection is fanciful. The number of people hostile to Islam

has, in any age, been much larger than that of Muslims, and they have possessed far greater and much more efficacious means of publicity than Muslims ever have. If any seemingly successful attempt had been made to produce an imitation of the Holy Qur'ān, it would not only have been preserved but also been widely publicised. After all, the infidels of Makkah used to bring all kinds of wild and fanatic charges against the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. For instance, they accused him of having learnt all that he taught from the monk, *Buhīrā* whom he had met only once in Syria; or, they imputed the Holy Qur'ān to the authorship of a Roman slave who, being an alien, could not have been a master of the Arabic language and of the characteristically Arab form of eloquence - the Holy Qur'ān itself has reported this calumny. But even they, for all their venom, never pretended to have produced something resembling the Holy Qur'ān. Anyhow, whatever funny or flimsy attempts have been made to match the Holy Qur'an are on record in the books of history. For example, *Musaylama* of Yemen, known as the Great Liar, came out with a string of obscenities as a reply to the Word of Allah, but his own people dismissed them for what they were worth. At a later date, the famous man of letters, 'Abdullāh Ibn al-Muqaffa' thought of trying his wits against the Holy Qur'ān, but soon gave up in despair.[11]

The point, however, is that if someone had really produced even three or four verses comparable to those of the Holy Qur'ān, the matter could not have gone without being passed down to us at least by the enemies of Islam. Of late a different kind of objection has sometimes been raised. They say that the impossibility of successfully imitating a book does not by itself argue that it is the Word of Allah or a miracle, for poets like Shakespeare or Ḥāfiẓ too have never been imitated successfully. But a miracle is, by definition, something which occurs without the like means having been employed. Every poet or writer in the world, even the greatest, is known to have undergone a

11. A latter-day adventurist has been the Irish novelist James Joyce who congratulated himself on having faced up to the Challenge of the Holy Qur'ān in his "Finnegans Wake". Soon recognized to be at least very funny, this book can already be seen to be going up in a smoke of jokes.

process of education and training in his art, and to have made use of certain means and methods which are humanly possible. But the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, as we have said before, did not even know reading or writing, and was never interested in learning the arts of eloquence. Moreover, it is not merely a question of literary style. In considering the Holy Qur'ān as a miracle, we must, above all, take into account the spiritual efficacy and the transforming power it has, and which it has been showing these last fourteen hundred years.[12]

Verse 25

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا وَعَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ اَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنّٰتٍ تَجْرِىْ مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْاَنْهٰرُ ؕ كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوْا مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رِّزْقًا ۙ قَالُوْا هٰذَا الَّذِىْ رُزِقْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ ۙ وَاُتُوْا بِهٖ مُتَشَابِهًا ؕ وَلَهُمْ فِيْهَآ اَزْوَاجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ ۙ وَّهُمْ فِيْهَا خٰلِدُوْنَ ۝

And give good tidings to those, who believe and do what is virtuous, that for them there are gardens beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are given a fruit from there to eat, they will say, 'this is what we have been given before'; and they are given one resembling the other. And for them there shall be wives purified; and there they are eternal. (Verse 25)

Verse 24 spoke of the fire of hell which has been prepared to

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12. We may conclude this discussion by quoting a passage from the well-known scholar of comparative religion and traditional civilizations, Frithjof Schuon: The superhuman value of a revealed Book cannot be apparent in an absolute fashion from its earthly form, nor from its conceptual content alone; in reality, the Divine and therefore miraculous quality of such a Book is of an order quite other than that of the most perfect dialectic or the most brilliant poetry. This quality shows itself first of all in a richness of meanings - a feature that is incapable of being imitated - and also in what might be called the underlying divine 'magic' which shines through the formal expression and proves itself by its results in souls, and in the world, in space and in time. Only this Divine substance can explain the spiritual and theurgic efficacy of the Qurā'nic verses, with its consequences in miraculously rapaid expansion of primitive Islam in the conditions in which it took place, as well as in the stability of Moslem institutions and the extraordinary fruitfulness of Islamic doctrine." ("Dimensions of Islam", London, 1970 page 55).

punish those who do not believe in the Holy Qur'ān; the present verse announces the reward for those who believe.

As for the fruits with which believers will be regaled in Paradise, some commentators say that this concerns only the fruits of Paradise which would be alike in shape, but each time different in taste. Others say that these fruits would resemble the fruits of the earth in shape alone, but their taste would be totally different. Anyhow, the point is that the believers would have a kind of joy in Paradise they had never known before, and that this joy would keep renewing itself at every moment.

Thus, the fruits of Paradise[13] may share a common name with the fruits of the earth, but they will be of a different nature.

The wives which the believers will have in Paradise, will be clean externally and pure internally - that is to say, free from everything that is physically disgusting like excrement and menstruation, and from everything that is morally disgusting like bad temper or unfaithfulness.

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13. We must sound a note of caution here. Our modernists have for some time been quite fond of asserting that in speaking of the fruits of Paradise and its other joys, the Holy Qur'ān has employed only a metaphysical mode of expression in order to suggest spiritual bliss which, by its very nature, is intangible. We do not mean to rule out the possibility or the desirability of analogical or symbolical interpretations of the verses of the Holy Qur'ān. In fact, many authentic Muslim scholars, particularly the Sufis, have made such attempts which have proved to be very illuminating in many ways. But no genuine Sufi has ever claimed that symbolical interpretation *(I'tibār)* is the same thing as exegesis (*tafsīr*), or that his own interpretation was exclusively the only valid one. The purpose of analogical interpretation has always been to serve as an aid in spiritual realization or in the elaboration of metaphysical doctrines, and not to negate or oppose the regular mode of exegesis. What our modern exegetes overlook in their zeal and in their simplicity is the obvious fact that if a thing is being used as a metaphor or a symbol, it does not necessarily argue that it does not exist objectively. In allowing for symbolical interpretations, we must carefully remember that since the Holy Qur'ān has spoken of the fruits of Paradise and of similar things, they must have an objective existence, though not a physical one (in the current sense of the word), and even though we have no knowledge as to their nature and state - all of which we can safely leave to Allah Himself. That way lies security, for that is the Straight Path.

The joys of Paradise will also be unlike the joys of the earth in that they will not be short-lived, nor will one have to be trembling with the fear of losing them, for the believers shall live in perpetual bliss for ever.

In giving these good tidings to those who believe, the Holy Qur'an adds another condition - that of good deeds -, for without good deeds, one cannot deserve such good tidings on the merit of *'Īmān* (faith) alone. *'Īmān* itself can, no doubt, save a man from being consigned to the fires of hell for ever, and every Muslim, even if he is a great sinner, will finally be taken out of hell, once he has undergone a period of punishment. But no one can altogether escape the fires of hell unless he has been doing good deeds defined by the Sharī'ah. (Rūḥ al Bayān: Qurṭubī)

Verses 26-27

إِنَّ اللّٰهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِۦٓ أَنْ يَّضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَّا بَعُوْضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا ط
فَأَمَّا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا فَيَعْلَمُوْنَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَّبِّهِمْ ج وَأَمَّا الَّذِيْنَ
كَفَرُوْا فَيَقُوْلُوْنَ مَاذَآ أَرَادَ اللّٰهُ بِهٰذَا مَثَلًا ج يُضِلُّ بِهٖ كَثِيْرًا
وَّيَهْدِيْ بِهٖ كَثِيْرًا ط وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهٖٓ إِلَّا الْفٰسِقِيْنَ ۝ الَّذِيْنَ
يَنْقُضُوْنَ عَهْدَ اللّٰهِ مِنْۢ بَعْدِ مِيْثَاقِهٖ وَيَقْطَعُوْنَ مَآ أَمَرَ اللّٰهُ بِهٖٓ
أَنْ يُّوْصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُوْنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ ط أُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الْخٰسِرُوْنَ ۝

Indeed, it does not embarrass Allah to use as a parable, a gnat or what exceeds it. Now, as for those who believe, they know it is the truth from their Lord; while those who disbelieve say, "What could have Allah meant by this parable?" By this He lets many go astray, and by this He makes many find guidance. But He does not let anyone go astray thereby except those who are sinful - those who break the Covenant of Allah after it has been made binding, and cut off what Allah has commanded to be joined, and spread disorder on the earth - it is these who are the losers. (Verses 26-27)

In the foregoing verses, it was affirmed that the Holy Qur'ān does not admit of any kind of doubt, and that if someone should have a suspicion as to its being the Word of God, he should try to produce even a small Surah comparable to it. These two verses refer to an objection raised by the disbelievers with regard to the Holy Qur'ān, and provide an answer to them. They had been saying that had the Qur'ān been the Word of Allah, it would not have employed contemptible creatures like an ant or a gnat in its parables, for such a thing goes against the sublimity and majesty of Allah, when it would embarrass even a man with some sense of dignity. The Holy Qur'ān points out that when one intends to speak of a detestable thing or person or situation, in a parable, the use of a gnat or something even more contemptible neither transgresses the principles of eloquence or logic, nor does it go against the sense of dignity or modesty, and hence Allah does not feel shy in using such imagery. The Holy Qur'ān also shows that doubts of this kind arise only in the minds of those whom their disbelief has drained of all power to see things in a proper perspective, while such empty misgivings never touch the minds and hearts of true believers.

Qur'ānic Parables: Test and guidance

The Holy Qur'ān proceeds to suggest even a *raison d'etre* for the use of such parables: they serve as a test for men. In the case of those who are ready to think and to understand, they become a source of guidance; but for those who refuse to understand, out of indifference or out of a stubborn hostility and denial, they are a cause of greater confusion and misguidance. In elaborating this point, the Holy Qur'ān specifies that these parables throw into confusion only those disobedient and rebellious people who disavow the covenant they have made with Allah, break all those relationships which Allah has commanded them to keep intact, and consequently produce an ever-widening disorder and anarchy in the world.

Who is *fāsiq* ?

The Arabic word used by the Holy Qur'ān in speaking of the disobedient is *Al-fāsiqīn*, its root being *fasaqa* which means 'to go outside or to stray beyond a limit'. In the terminology of the *Sharī'ah*, *fisq* signifies 'going beyond the circle of obedience to Allah, or

transgressing the commandments of Allah'. Now, transgression does not stop at being merely disobedient in one's actions, but can sometimes lead to outright denial and disbelief. So, the word *fāsiq* is applied to a disbeliever (*kāfir*) as well - such a use of the word is frequent in the Holy Qur'ān. A Muslim who is a habitual sinner is also called a *fāsiq* - this is how the jurists (*Fuqaha'*) ordinarily use the word, making the *fāsiq* a counterpart of the *kāfir* on the opposite side. That is to say, a man who commits a major sin and does not repent, or who insists on committing minor sins and makes it a habit, would be called a *fāsiq* in the terminology of the *Fuqaha'*; on the other hand, a man who commits such sins publicly and openly without being ashamed of it is called a *fājir*. (See Maẓharī)

Living by the Covenant with Allah

The Covenant which the transgressors disavow refers to the one that all men made with Allah before any of them came down to the earth. The Holy Qur'ān says that Allah brought together the spirits of all men, and asked them: اَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ :"Am I not your Lord?" And they replied with one voice: بَلٰى : "Yes" (7:172). This acceptance and affirmation of Allah as their only Lord and Master requires that men should in no way be disobedient to Him. Allah's books and His prophets come down to the world to remind them of this Covenant, to renew it, and to teach them in detail how to act upon it. Now, those who break this Covenant, how can they ever be expected to learn from the prophets and the books of Allah?

Islamic concern about relationship to others

The cutting asunder of what Allah has commanded should be joined includes all kinds of relationships -- the one between Allah and His servant, the one between a man and his parents and relatives, between him and his neighbours and friends, between one Muslim and another, between one man and another. Actually, Islam means fulfilling one's obligations with regard to all these relationships, and this is also the way to follow the *Sharī'ah*. Deficiency in fulfilling these obligations produces all kinds of disorder among men, and thus the transgressors end up by being destructive for others and for themselves. It is these, the Holy Qur'ān says, who are the losers -- in this world as in the other.

Injunctions and related considerations:

(1) Verse 26 shows if one intends to explain something useful or essential for the spiritual guidance of one's readers or listeners, it is neither sinful nor reprehensible to refer to something which is generally supposed to be contemptible or dirty, nor does it go against the dignity of the writer or the speaker. Examples of the use of such images or parables occur in the Holy Qur'ān, the *Ḥadīth*, and in the writings of the Sūfīs and other great Muslim scholars, all of whom have disregarded the habitual idea of modesty or seriousness in the interest of the real object to be attained.

(2) The reference to the disavowing of one's covenant with Allah indicates that the infringement of a contract or agreement made with one's fellow men is a grave sin, which may have the consequence of depriving a man of the ability to do good deeds.

(3) Verse 27 shows that it is essential for us to maintain the relationships which the *Sharī'ah* has commanded us to keep intact, and that it is forbidden to break them. Indeed, religion itself signifies the divinely ordained laws which bind us to fulfil our obligations with regard to Allah (*Huqūqullāh*) and with regard to His servants (*Ḥuqūq al-'Ibād*). According to this verse, the fundamental cause of disorder in human society is the sundering of these relationships.

(4) The Holy Qur'ān says that real losers are those who go against divine commandments. There is a suggestion here that real loss pertains to the other world, the loss of this world being too small a thing to be worthy of serious consideration.

Verses 28-29

كَيْفَ تَكْفُرُوْنَ بِاللّٰهِ وَ كُنْتُمْ اَمْوَاتًا فَاَحْيَاكُمْ ۚ ثُمَّ يُمِيْتُكُمْ ثُمَّ
يُحْيِيْكُمْ ثُمَّ اِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُوْنَ ۝ هُوَ الَّذِىْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَّا فِى
الْاَرْضِ جَمِيْعًا ۚ ثُمَّ اسْتَوٰٓى اِلَى السَّمَآءِ فَسَوّٰهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمٰوٰتٍ ۭ
وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيْمٌ ۝

"How is it that you deny Allah despite that you were lifeless and He gave you life, then He will make you die, then make you live again, and then to Him you will be

returned? It is He who created for you all that the earth contains; then He turned to the heavens and made them seven skies -- and He is the knower of all things." (Verses 28-29)

The earlier verses affirmed the existence and the Oneness of Allah, and prophethood, giving self-evident proofs and refuting the whimsical and false notions of the doubters and the disbelievers. These two verses speak of the blessings which Allah has showered on man, pointing out that all the same there are men who do not recognize the bounty of Allah and persist in their denial -- the suggestion being that if they do not want to take the trouble of considering the arguments which have been advanced by the Holy Qur'ān in the earlier verses, they should, as every man with an undistorted nature must, at least be grateful to their benefactor, for even this would be a way of realizing why they should be obedient to Allah.

The first of these two verses refers to the blessings which are particular to the very being of man -- that is to say, he had no life before Allah gave him existence. The second verse refers to the general blessings which are common to man and other creatures -- firstly, the earth and all that it contains and on which man's life immediately depends, and secondly, the skies with which life on earth is directly related.

Verse 28 begins by expressing surprise at those who insist on being ungrateful to Allah and on denying Him. On the face of it, the disbelievers had never denied Allah but only the Holy Prophet ﷺ, all the same, the Holy Qur'ān equates such a denial with the denial of Allah Himself.

Then, the verse reminds man that once he was "dead" (*amwāt*), or that he had no life. He existed, if at all, in the shape of billions of lifeless particles aimlessly floating; Allah brought them together, made them into a man, and gave them life.

The verse proceeds to warn him that Allah will take away his life, and then give it back to him a second time. This second life refers to the Day of Judgment when Allah will collect the lifeless and scattered particles of each and every man again, and give him a new life. Thus,

the first 'death' or 'state of lifelessness' was at the beginning before man received life from Allah; the second death comes when a man completes the life-span allotted to him; and the second life will be given on the Day of Judgment.

The verse ends by telling man that he will ultimately go back to Allah. This, of course, refers to the Resurrection when all men will rise from their graves, will be assembled for giving an account of their deeds, and be finally punished or rewarded according to what they had been doing in the world.

According to this verse, the chief blessing of Allah for man is life, for without life he cannot profit from any other blessing. This is obvious enough. But the verse counts death too as a blessing. It is so, because physical death is the door to the perpetual life of the other world after which there is no death.

In recounting the blessings which man has received from Allah, verse 29 refers to Allah having created for man "all that the earth contains." This small phrase comprehends all kinds of benefits which accrue to him from the earth and its produce. Then, the verse speaks of the creation of the sky and its division into seven skies or heavens, as they are usually called in English. In this context, the Holy Qur'ān uses the Arabic word, *Istawā* which initially means 'to stand upright, to climb', and thence signifies 'to turn or pay attention to something', and, in a wider sense, 'to take a straight and firm decision which nothing can hinder'. The implication here is that Allah being Omniscient and Omnipotent, it was not at all difficult for Him to create the universe, once He had decided to do so.

The life in 'Barzakh'
(The period between death and resurrection)

(1) Verse 28 shows that a man who does not apparently deny Allah, but refuses to accept the Holy Prophet ﷺ as the Messenger of Allah, and the Holy Qur'ān as the Book of Allah, would still be counted among those who do not believe in Allah.

(2) Verse 28 mentions only one kind of life which is to follow one's physical death - that is, the life which will begin on the Day of Resurrection - but says nothing about the life in the grave, although

the Holy Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* explicitly speak of how people will be questioned about their faith in their graves, and will also receive some reward or punishment. Now, this life in the grave is something intermediary (*Barzakh*) between the life which man has in this world and one he will have in the other. In other words, it is a state in between the two, resembling the life one has while dreaming; it can be called a supplement to the life of this world as also a prelude to the life hereafter. In short, this intermediary life is not in itself a distinct entity, and hence need not be mentioned separately.

(3) According to verse 29, everything in the universe has been created for man. It means that there is nothing in the universe from which man does not derive some benefit in one way or the other, directly or indirectly. There are things which man uses physically as food or medicine; other things are useful for him without his knowing it; even poisonous or dangerous things do him some good; even things which are forbidden for him in one of their aspects, may in some other aspect be quite beneficial; finally, almost everything can serve to teach him a lesson or illuminate him in the interest of his life in the Hereafter. The great Sūfī Ibn 'Aṭā' remarks in connection with this verse: 'Allah has created the universe for you so that it should serve you and you should serve Allah. A wise man should thus know that he will certainly get what has been created for him, and should not, in worrying about it, forget the Being for whom he himself has been created' (Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ).

(4) On the basis of verse 29, some scholars have come to the conclusion that since everything in the world has been created for man, it is essentially legitimate (*Ḥalāl*) and permissible (*Mubāḥ*) for man to make use of everything, except the things which have been forbidden by the *Sharī'ah*. So, the use of a thing is to be regarded as lawful so long as the Holy Qur'ān or the *Ḥadīth* does not forbid it.

On the contrary, some other scholars say that the mere fact of a thing having been created for the benefit of man does not argue that it automatically becomes lawful to make use of it. So, the use of everything is essentially unlawful unless an explicit statement in the Holy Qur'ān or the *Ḥadīth*, or an argument based on them establishes the use of a thing as legitimate.

There are still other authentic scholars who have not taken sides in this controversy. Ibn Hayyan, in his commentary 'Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ', points out that this verse does not provide a valid basis for either of the two views, for the letter *lām* in the phrase خَلَقَ لَكُمْ : *khalaqa lakum* indicates causation, signifying that the universe has been "created for your sake." So, one cannot draw any conclusion from the phrase as to the use of everything being essentially legitimate or illegitimate. The injunction with regard to the legitimacy or the illegitimacy of the use of particular things have been provided elsewhere in the Holy Qur'ān and the *Ḥadīth*, and it is obligatory to follow these injunctions.

(5) Verse 29 shows that the earth was created before the skies, as indicated by the word, ثُمَّ : *Thumma* ('then'). Another verse of the Holy Qur'ān seems to be saying the opposite: وَالْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ ذٰلِكَ دَحٰهَا : "He spread out the earth after this." (79:30) But it does not necessarily mean that the earth was created after the skies. What it actually implies is that although the earth had already been created when the skies came into being, yet a final shape was given to it after the creation of the skies. (Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ, etc.)

(6) According to verse 29, the skies are seven in number. This shows that the opinion of the ancient Greek astronomers and some Muslim philosophers, who used to speak of nine heavens, was no more than a conjecture.

Verses 30-33

وَاِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِنِّيْ جَاعِلٌ فِي الْاَرْضِ خَلِيْفَةً ۭ قَالُوْٓا
اَتَجْعَلُ فِيْهَا مَنْ يُّفْسِدُ فِيْهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاۗءَ ۚ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ
بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۭ قَالَ اِنِّيْٓ اَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ ۝ وَعَلَّمَ اٰدَمَ
الْاَسْمَاۗءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَي الْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ ۙ فَقَالَ اَنْۢبِـُٔوْنِيْ بِاَسْمَاۗءِ
هٰٓؤُلَاۗءِ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ صٰدِقِيْنَ ۝ قَالُوْا سُبْحٰنَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَآ اِلَّا مَا
عَلَّمْتَنَا ۭ اِنَّكَ اَنْتَ الْعَلِيْمُ الْحَكِيْمُ ۝ قَالَ يٰٓاٰدَمُ اَنْۢبِئْهُمْ بِاَسْمَاۗىِٕهِمْ ۚ

فَلَمَّآ اَنۢبَاَهُمۡ بِاَسۡمَآئِهِمۡ ۙ قَالَ اَلَمۡ اَقُلۡ لَّكُمۡ اِنِّىۡۤ اَعۡلَمُ غَيۡبَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالۡاَرۡضِ ۙ وَاَعۡلَمُ مَا تُبۡدُوۡنَ وَمَا كُنۡتُمۡ تَكۡتُمُوۡنَ ۝

And when your Lord said to the angels, "I am going to create a deputy on the earth!" They said, "Will You create there one who will spread disorder on the earth and cause bloodsheds while we, along with your praises, proclaim Your purity and sanctify Your name?" He said, "Certainly, I know what you do not know." And He taught Ādam the names, all of them; then presented them before the angels, and said, "Tell me their names, if you are right." They said, "To You belongs all purity! We have no knowledge except what You have given us. Surely, You alone are the all-knowing, all-wise." He said, "O Ādam, tell them the names of all these." When he told them their names, Allah said, "Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of the skies and of the earth, and that I know what you disclose and what you have been concealing. (Verses 30 - 33)

The preceding verses recounted the general and some of the particular blessings of Allah, and asked man to recognize them and not to be ungrateful and disobedient to his Benefactor. Now, ten verses, beginning with the 30th, tell the story of the father of mankind, Ādam عليه السلام , in continuation of this theme and also by way of illustration. For, blessings are of two kinds - tangible and intangible. Food, water, money, houses, or lands are some of the tangible blessings; while honour, happiness or knowledge are intangible ones. The earlier verses were concerned with blessings of the first kind; these verses speak of those of the second kind - that is to say, how Allah bestowed the gift of knowledge on Ādam عليه السلام , made the angels prostrate themselves before him to show their respect, and gave men the honour of being his sons.

The creation of Ādam عليه السلام

The present three verses relate how Allah, having decided to create Ādam عليه السلام and to make him His deputy on the earth, spoke of it to the angels - seemingly by way of a trial, suggesting that they should

express their opinions in this matter. The angels submitted that they could not understand why men were being chosen to be the deputies, for some of them would shed blood and spread disorder on this earth. They thought that they themselves were more suited to perform this function, as the nature of angels is wholly good, no evil deed can possibly come out of them, they are totally obedient to Allah, and should hence be more capable of managing the affairs of the world. In replying to them, Allah first adopted the mode of authority, and told the angels that they knew nothing about the nature and the needs of deputation on the earth, and that Allah alone was the one to know it fully. The second answer was in the mode of wisdom - Ādam عليه السلام had been given preference over the angels on account of his superiority in the station of knowledge, because in order to function properly as a deputy on the earth one must know the names, the properties and the characteristics of the things to be found there, and the angels had no aptitude for this kind of knowledge.

(1) A question arises here as to why Allah chose to speak of His decision to the angels. Was it merely to inform them? Was it to seek their advice? Or, was it to make them express their opinion on the subject?

Why Allah discussed Ādam's creation with angels?

As for seeking advice, it is obvious enough that one turns for advice to wise and trustworthy people only when one cannot see all the aspects of a problem clearly, and does not want to depend on one's own knowledge and understanding alone, or when the rights of others are equal to one's own, and they too have to be consulted, as happens in the counsels of the world. Evidently, neither of the two situations obtain in the present case. Allah is the creator of the universe, and knows everything about the smallest particle of dust; He sees and hears everything, apparent or hidden. How can He stand in need of anyone's advice? Similarly, He does not run the universe under the parliamentary system, in which all have equal rights and everyone has to be consulted directly or indirectly. He is the Lord and Master, and all His creatures, be they men or angels, are His slaves - no one

has the right to question Him about His actions, and to ask Him why He did this or why He did not do that: لَا يُسْئَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْئَلُوْنَ : "He cannot be questioned as to what He does, while they are to be questioned." (21:23)

In fact, Allah did not mean to seek the advice of the angels, nor was there any need for it, but He, in His wisdom, gave a mere statement the form of a consultation in order to teach men the advisability of mutual consultation. After all, the Holy Prophet ﷺ was a messenger of Allah, and all the information he needed in dealing with the affairs of the world could have been conveyed to him by means of revelation, and yet the Holy Qur'ān asks him to seek the advice of his Companions, so that the Islamic community should learn this lesson from him and the way of mutual consultation should be established through him. In short, this is the first *raison d'etre* of the mode of expression adopted by Allah. (Rūḥ al-Bayān)

The other has been suggested by the Holy Qur'ān itself. Before the appearance of man, the angels had taken it for granted that Allah would not create a being who should be superior to them and greater in knowledge - as has been reported in a narration coming down from the blessed Companion Ibn 'Abbās and cited by Ibn Jarīr in his commentary. But Allah knew that He would create a being who would be superior to all other creatures and greater than them in knowledge, and who would receive the gift of divine viceregency. So, Allah mentioned this in the assembly of the angels so that they may disclose what they had been thinking. Speaking according to their own lights, they very humbly submitted that a creature like man who carried within himself a tendency towards evil and disorder and who would not balk even at blood-shed, could not be expected to maintain peace and order on the earth, while they themselves, being free of all evil, and perfect in their obedience and devotion, could perform the function more satisfactorily. They did not mean to raise an objection to the choice which Allah had made, for angels are innocent of such sentiments; they were only being curious, and wanted to know the *raison d'etre* of such a choice.

To begin with, Allah gave them a very brief reply - إِنِّيْ أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ :

"I know what you do not know", implying that they are not aware of the nature and the requirements of divine viceregency, which had led them to suppose that only pure and innocent beings could fulfil the conditions necessary for such a responsible position.

Then, Allah demonstrated the truth to them in a vivid form. He gave to Ādam عليه السلام a kind of knowledge for which he alone had been endowed with the proper aptitude, and not the angels. That is to say, He taught him the names, the properties and qualities of all the existents, animate or inanimate. Angelic nature is not capable of such awareness - for example, an angel cannot really experience the pain of hunger and thirst, the tumult of passions, the torment from the bite of a scorpion or a snake, or the exhilaration from an intoxicant. Only Ādam عليه السلام had the capacity to learn such things, and he was taught to know them. Then, there is no indication in the Holy Qur'ān to show that he was taught in privacy, apart from the angels. It may well be that the teaching in itself was open to the angels as well as to him; his nature allowed him to receive it, and he learnt the lesson, while, they were impeded by their own proper nature, and could not. Or, it may be that the teaching did not take an external form at all, but that the Adamic nature was made to carry this particular kind of knowledge within itself without the need of a formal education, just as an infant does not have to be taught how to suck the mother's milk, or a duckling how to swim. As to the question why Allah, being omnipotent, did not change the nature of the angels and make them learn these things, we shall say that the question, in fact, boils down to this: Why did not Allah change the angels into men? For, if their nature had been altered, they would no longer have remained angels, but become men.

In short, through this demonstration Allah made the angels realize how wrong they were in supposing that He would not create any being superior to them in any way, and that they themselves were more suitable for being the viceregents of Allah than Ādam عليه السلام . Since they failed to name the things which Ādam عليه السلام could, they came to see that purity and innocence is not the criterion in choosing a deputy

or viceregent but the knowledge of the things which are to be found on the earth, of the ways of using them, and of the consequences which would follow from such a use.

We can also infer a general principle from the episode - it is necessary for a ruler to know fully the nature, the temperament and the peculiarities of the people over whom he is to rule, without which he cannot enforce justice and order. If one does not know the pain of being hungry, how can one deal justice to the man who has unjustly been kept hungry?

We may also point out that in expressing their opinion, the angels were neither raising an objection, nor being vain and proud, nor asserting their right; it was, on their part, only a humble submission, and an offer of their services. When they found that there was another being who was, with his special kind of knowledge, more suitable for the function, they as humbly acknowledged the fact and withdrew their earlier opinion in saying: سُبْحٰنَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَآ إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَآ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيْمُ الْحَكِيْمُ : "To You belongs all purity! We have no knowledge except what You have given us. Surely, You alone are the all-knowing, the all-wise." In the present context, the phrase, "To You belongs all purity" also has the implication that Allah is free from the charge of having withheld from the angels the knowledge which He gave to Ādam عليه السلام , for, being the all-knowing and the all-wise, He gives to each creature the kind and the degree of knowledge and understanding which He, and He alone, knows to be in consonance with the specific nature of that creature.

Another question which may arise out of this episode is: How did the angels come to know that man would shed blood? Did they possess the knowledge of hidden things and of divine secrets? Or, was it a mere conjecture on their part? Most of the authoritative scholars believe, on the basis of certain آثار : '*Āthār*' or reports available about the blessed Companions, that it was Allah Himself who had informed the angels on this occasion as to how man would behave on the earth. (See 'Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī'). It is only then that they became curious about the *raison d'etre* of man being chosen as the viceregent in spite of his propensity to evil

Beside demonstrating the superiority of Ādam عليه السلام in knowledge, Allah dispelled the misgivings of the angels with regard to the evil propensities in man by the short and simple answer, إِنِّيٓ أَعۡلَمُ مَا لَا تَعۡلَمُونَ : "Certainly, I know what you do not know." There is a subtle suggestion here - what makes man fit for viceregency is just the peculiarity which, in the eyes of the angels, made him unfit for this function. For, a deputy or viceregent is needed on the earth just for the purpose of preventing blood-shed and disorder; if there is no possibility of disorder in a place, where is the need for sending there an administrator? Thus, it was the Divine Will and Wisdom that, just as Allah had created beings as innocent and sinless as the angels, or beings as totally evil as Satan and his progeny, or beings like the jinns in whom evil dominated over good, He would also create beings in whom good and evil should be equally mixed, who should try to conquer the evil in themselves and to grow in goodness so as to seek and attain the pleasure of their Creator.

Allah is the creator of the language

(2) This episode, according to Imām al-Aṣh'arī, shows that language as such has been created by Allah Himself, and not invented by man - its use by different kinds of men has later on produced the many forms of language.

(3) One should note a subtle suggestion here in the use of two words. In asking the angels for the names of things, Allah said, أَنۢبِـُٔونِي : "Tell Me"; but in commanding Ādam عليه السلام to do so, He said, أَنۢبِـُٔهُمۡ : "Tell them." The difference in the mode of expression shows that Ādam عليه السلام was given the rank of a teacher, and the angels that of pupils. It is thus an indication of his superiority over them. Another thing the episode indicates is that an increase or decrease is possible in the degree of knowledge the angels possess, for they were given, through Ādam عليه السلام , at least a primary knowledge about a thing which they did not know before.

Man is the viceregent of Allah on the earth

(4) These verses tell us that a viceregent was appointed to keep order on the earth and to promulgate divine laws. From here we learn the basic principles for the governance of men on the earth. The

ultimate sovereignty in the universe belongs to Allah Himself, as is explicitly stated in many verses of the Holy Qur'ān: إِنِ الْحُكْمُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ : "Judgment belongs to Allah alone" (6:57); لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ : "The sovereignty of the skies and the earth belongs to Him alone" (9:116); أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ : "Verily, His is the Creation and the Command." (7:54)

But He has, in His wisdom, chosen to send His viceregents to the earth for maintaining spiritual and temporal order. Their function is to announce and promulgate divine commandments, to teach men how to abide by these laws, and sometimes even to exercise temporal power as well as spiritual authority under divine guidance. The appointment is made directly by Allah Himself, and is in no sense a reward for the good deeds or the spiritual effort of the individual concerned. There is a total consensus of all the authentic scholars of the Islamic *Ummah* on the doctrine that prophethood is not a thing which one can attain through one's personal effort or on the merit of one's good deeds, but that Allah Himself, in His supreme knowledge and wisdom, chooses certain individuals for acting as His messengers, prophets and viceregents. The Holy Qur'ān has explicitly declared it in several verses: اَللّٰهُ يَصْطَفِيْ مِنَ الْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ رُسُلًا وَّمِنَ النَّاسِ إِنَّ اللّٰهَ سَمِيْعٌۢ بَصِيْرٌ : "Allah chooses His messengers from among the angels and from among men; surely Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing" (22:75); اَللّٰهُ أَعْلَمُ حَيْثُ يَجْعَلُ رِسٰلَتَهٗ : "Allah knows best whom to entrust with His message" (6:124).

These viceregents receive divine commandments directly from Allah, and then promulgate them in the world. The chain of viceregents began with Ādam عليه السلام and continued in the same way upto the Holy Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.

The Holy Prophet ﷺ was the last Caliph of Allah on earth

(5) The Holy Prophet ﷺ came to the earth as the last viceregent (*Khalīfa*), the last Messenger (*Rasūl*) and the last prophet (*Nabiyy*) of Allah, endowed with certain special qualities peculiar to him which he does not share with any other prophet. We may mention some of these characteristics:

(a) Each of the earlier prophets was sent for the guidance of a particular country or people, and his authority was limited to his jurisdiction alone, - for example, Mūsā and 'Īsā - (Moses and Jesus

Christ (علیهم السلام) were sent to Banī Isrā'īl (the Israelites). But the Holy Prophet ﷺ has been sent for the guidance of all the men and all the jinns, and his authority extends to all the members of the two species. The Holy Qur'ān has declared the universality of his prophethood in these words: قُلْ يَاأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ : "Say: O mankind, I am the messenger of Allah to you all, of Him to whom belongs the sovereignty of the skies and of the earth" (7:158). A *hadīth* of the *Sahīh* of Muslim reports the Holy Prophet ﷺ as having said that he had been made superior to all other prophets in six things. The first of these is, of course, the universality of his prophethood.

(b) Just as the viceregency and prophethood of all the earlier prophets was limited to particular peoples and countries, in the same way it was also limited to specific periods; when the age of one prophet was over, another prophet would come to take his place as the new viceregent. On the contrary, the Holy Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ has been sent by Allah as the last of all prophets; his prophethood is not circumscribed within a specific period, but shall last till the end of time.

(c) It has so happened that the teachings and the Sharī'ah of each of the earlier prophets would remain intact for a time, but then gradually people would start deviating from them and distorting them till they became unrecognizable; at this stage Allah would send a new prophet with a new Sharī'ah. But the Sharī'ah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ is to remain alive in its integral form upto the end of the universe. Allah has taken upto Himself the responsibility of protecting the words and the meanings of the Holy Qur'ān:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَ إِنَّا لَهُ لَحٰفِظُوْنَ

"It is We who have sent down the Remembrance (i.e. the Holy Qur'ān) and We are its Protector" (15:9).

Similarly, He has made a special provision for the preservation of the *Hadīth* which contains the teachings of the Holy Prophet ﷺ that is to say, in spite of all the vicissitudes of time there shall remain till the Doomsday a group of people who will preserve these teachings and transmit them accurately to others, and who will receive help and protection from Allah Himself. Since Allah has ordained the survival

of the Holy Qur'ān and the *Ḥadīth*, there is obviously no need for a new prophet or messenger or viceregent and no room for a new Sharī'ah.

(d) Contrary to the case of all the earlier prophets, the prophethood and viceregency of the last of them, Muḥammad ﷺ, is not limited to a particular period, but is to continue upto the end of time, and those who succeed him for the preservation of spiritual and temporal order in the world, are to be, not the viceregents of Allah, but the viceregents of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his deputies. A *ḥadīth* reported by al-Bukhārī and Muslim both says:

كانت بنو إسرائيل تسوسهم الأنبياء ، كلما هلك نبى خلفه نبى وانه ، لانبى بعدى وسيكون خلفاء فيكثرون

"The Israelites were governed by their prophets. When a prophet died, another would come to take his place. And beware, no prophet is to come after me. Of course, there will be my deputies (*Khulafā'*), and there will be many of them."

The issue of Caliphate after the Holy Prophet ﷺ

(e) Allah has ordained that after the Holy Prophet ﷺ his *Ummah*, or the Islamic community, shall as a body enjoy the privilege which has been that of the prophets عليهم السلام. That is to say, the *Ummah* as a collective body has been declared to be innocent and under the special protection of Allah Himself, so that it will never unanimously agree upon a doctrinal error or a deviation, and hence any decision which has been arrived at in religious matters through the consensus of the *Ummah* is to be regarded as manifestation of Divine Commandment. That is why the consensus of the *Ummah* has been accepted as the third source of the *Sharī'ah*, the first two being the Holy Qur'an and the *Hadith*. For the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has himself said, لن تجتمع امتى على الضلالة :"My *Ummah* shall never collectively agree upon error." And we have already referred to another *ḥadīth* which tells us that no matter how much the world has changed or how indifferent people have grown to the Truth, there shall always remain in the Islamic *Ummah* a group of people who will defend and preserve the Truth, and who will finally win.

(6) Since it has been ordained that the Islamic *Ummah* as a body

shall never go wrong, the responsibility of choosing a deputy to the Holy Prophet ﷺ has also been entrusted to it. Now, for the governance of the earth the legitimate way is that the *Ummah* should select a *Khalīfah* who, once chosen, would solely be responsible for the maintenance of spiritual and temporal order. And it is also possible that there should be a single *Khalīfah* for the whole world.

The first to succeed the Holy Prophet ﷺ as his deputies were the First Four Great *Khalīfahs*, known as *al-Khulafā' al-Rashidūn* (or the rightly-guided ones, commonly translated as the 'Orthodox Caliphs'), and the *Khilafāt* order functioned according to the proper principles upto the end of their time. So, their decisions are not merely temporary judgments, but have a permanent legislative value, and carry an authority in their own degree, for the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said, عليكم بسنتى و سنة الخلفاء الراشدين :'Follow my way steadfastly, and the way of the rightly-guided *Khalifahs*.'

After the age of the rightly-guided *Khalīfahs*, different rulers appeared in different regions, but none of them can be described as a *Khalīfah* of the whole Islamic community in the proper sense of the term, though they may be called the *Amīrs* of particular regions. When it became practically impossible for all the Muslims of the world to agree upon one man as their *Khalīfah*, and it became customary to have a separate *Amīr* for each region, people accepted the principle that the man who had been chosen or acknowledged by the majority of the Muslims in a country, should be called the *Amīr* of that country. The basis for this procedure has been provided by the Holy Qur'ān itself: وَاَمْرُهُمْ شُوْرٰى بَيْنَهُمْ :"And they conduct their affairs by mutual consultation" (42:38).

The modern legislative assemblies are a form of mutual consultation, with the difference that they are quite free to make whatever laws they like according to their own opinion, while an Islamic legislative assembly, its members and their *Amīr* all shall be bound by the law which Allah has sent us through the Holy Prophet ﷺ. There are certain specific conditions for the membership of an Islamic assembly as well as for the choice of an *Amīr*. And, most

important of all, laws must be made within the bounds of the basic principles laid down by the Holy Qur'ān and *Sunnah*, the authority of which the assembly cannot have the right to question.

Let me give a brief summary of the whole discussion. The verses which tell us of how Allah informed the angels about his intention to send a viceregent to the earth, provide us with some of the fundamental principles of the governance of man:-

(a) The sovereignty of the skies and of the earth belongs to Allah Himself.

(b) The function of promulgating the Commandments of Allah on the earth is performed by a viceregent who is at the same time a messenger of Allah and His Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم .

(c) The chain of such viceregents ends with the Holy Prophet ﷺ, for he is the last Messenger and Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم .

(d) Now the function of viceregency is performed by the deputies of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم .

(e) Such a deputy (*Khalīfah*) is to be chosen by the *Ummah* or Islamic community.[14]

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14. (1) Some Modernists have zealously taken to the habit of interpreting these verses as implying that man as a viceregent of Allah is required to make a 'progress' in 'Science' - that is, in the empirical study of physical phenomena; a so-called 'Muslim' translator of the Holy Qur'an has even had the temerity to translate the name 'Ādam' by the English word 'Man', thus denying the existence and prophethood of Ādam عليه السلام . In order to dispel such grave errors and distortions of word and meaning, let us point out that the 'names' which Allah taught to Ādam عليه السلام do not refer merely to the chemical or biological or psychological properties of things and men, but to their essential qualities and aptitudes - we are using the word 'essential' in the technical and metaphysical sense of the word in which it was originally used in the West too. Maulana Ashraf Alī Thānavi adds in his 'Bayān al-Qur'ān' that the knowledge of the 'names' even includes a knowledge of the injunctions of the Sharī'ah as to the distinction between the lawful and the unlawful. Then, there are many great Sūfīs who maintain that Ādam عليه السلام was given the knowledge of 'the names of Allah' - not of all the divine names in detail, of course, for it is not possible for a created being to comprehend the Infinite, but of divine names in a summary form. This interpretation

Continued

Verse 34

وَاِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اسْجُدُوْا لِاٰدَمَ فَسَجَدُوْٓا اِلَّآ اِبْلِيْسَ ؕ اَبٰى
وَاسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكٰفِرِيْنَ ۝

And when We said to the angels: "Prostrate before Adam!" So, they prostrated, all but Iblis. He refused, and joined the infidels." (Verse 34)

The episode recounted in the foregoing verses has shown how the angels came to learn that Adam عليه السلام was superior to them in so far as he possessed the forms of knowledge necessary for the function of

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Continued

has been advanced by as authentic a commentator as Qadi Thanaullah of Pānīpat in his 'Tafsīr al-Maẓharī'. In the explanation of this subtle point we may say that every thing that exists reflects some divine attribute, which in its turn is a manifestation of a divine name; thus, divine names are the essential principles or roots of all things, and one who knows divine names does also know things in their inner natures.

(2) With regard to the question of the viceregency of Allah, we cannot pass over a very serious distortion of the authentic doctrine which has been introduced by the Modernists and seems to be growing in currency. Under the influence of Western Humanism, and specially in their indifference to doctrinal matters, the Modernists have come to identify the prophet and the father of mankind, Ādam عليه السلام totally with the biological species called 'man', and have made out as if every individual member of this species, unconditionally and without any qualifications, is born to be a viceregent of Allah. The error has been promoted by a thoughtless misreading of *Sufi* metaphysical texts and *Sufi* poetry. What our Modernists have never cared to learn is the concept of degrees and their distinctions. The Sufis, no doubt, often speak of 'man' as being the viceregent of Allah, but what they are actually referring to is not a biological organism or species, but '*Al-Insān Al-Kāmil*', 'the Universal Man' - a term which the orientalists have wrongly rendered as 'the perfect man', thus introducing ethical implications in the sphere of pure metaphysics. In the writings of the Sufis, prose and poetry both, 'Man' also stands for 'the Total and Essential Reality of man' (*Al-Ḥaqīqah al-Jāmi'ah al-Insāniyyah*). Now, the Universal Man par excellence is the Holy Prophet ﷺ this is the first degree of "manhood" to which belong the *Aulia'* (Men of Allah or the great saints) and those rulers who dealt justice according to the *Sharī'ah*.

Then, there are lower degrees pertaining to the pious and the virtuous Muslims down to the lowest degree where stand people who are sinful, yet, being Muslims, can hope for salvation. Allah alone knows best as to

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divine viceregency, while they themselves did not, nor did the jinns. Now, Allah willed to manifest this superiority in a visible and concrete form. So, He commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before Ādam عليه السلام in his honour. They obeyed except Iblis or Satan who, in his pride, refused to do so.

If we go by the words of the Holy Qur'ān, the command was given to the angels alone, but, in excepting Iblis from those who obeyed, the text also suggests that the command was given to all the created beings that existed at that time and possessed understanding, including the jinns as well as the angels. But the Holy Qur'ān mentions the angels alone, because when superior beings like the angels were required to show their respect for Ādam عليه السلام , inferior creatures like the jinns must, it goes without saying, have been ordered to do the same.

Angels prostrate before Ādam

(1) In this verse, the angels have been commanded to prostrate themselves before Ādam عليه السلام . Another verse of the Holy Qur'an tells us that the parents and the brothers of Yūsuf (Joseph) عليه السلام on reaching Egypt, prostrated themselves before him (12:100). Evidently such a prostration cannot have been intended as an act of worship, for worshipping anyone other than Allah is an act of association (*Shirk*) and infidelity (*Kufr*), and hence cannot possibly be allowed by any

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who belongs to which degree; below the degree of the blessed Companions one can never speak with certitude. If we allow ourselves to associate vicreregency with an ordinary Muslim, it would only be viceregency, so to say, by reflection, just as the *'Īmān* of every Muslim is only a reflection of the *'Īmān* of the Holy Prophet ﷺ . Any way, the necessary condition of receiving even a faint reflection of viceregency and "Manhood" is that one should be a Muslim, for, as the Holy Qur'ān has explicitly declared, 'Allah shall not now accept any faith except Islam.' As for attributing viceregency of "Manhood" to common man as such is concerned, it can at best only be viceregency, to use Aristotelean terms, in potency and not in act - it cannot be effective unless it is actualized through a total submission to the *Sharī'ah* and a strenuous spiritual effort and waiting upon the grace of Allah. In fact, the highest excellence open to man now is to be in word and deed and thought a perfect follower of the *Sunnah*, the way of the Holy Prophet ﷺ .

Sharī'ah. So, it appears that in the days of the ancient prophets prostrating oneself before somebody must have been just an act of courtesy or a way of showing one's respect, and enjoyed the same value as we do in our own days things like a simple greeting, a hand-shake, the kissing of hand, or standing up in someone's honour. Imam Al-Jassās has said in his *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* that it was permissible in the *Sharī'ah* of the earlier prophets علیہم السلام to prostrate oneself in honour of one's elders, but that the *Sharī'ah* of the Holy Prophet ﷺ has forbidden gestures like prostrating oneself, or bowing down very low or standing with one hand placed on the other in the manner of the *Salāh* before someone, all of which may suggest an act of worship, and has allowed only greeting (*Salām*) and hand-shake as a gesture of courtesy or respect.

It is easy to understand the *raison d'etre* of such a prohibition. Association, infidelity and the worship of anyone other than Allah are things which in their nature go against the very principle of *'Īmān* (faith), and cannot therefore be tolerated by any *Sharī'ah*. There are, however, certain acts and gestures which are not in themselves acts of 'association' or infidelity, but may, on account of the ignorance or indifference of people, become a prelude to 'association' and infidelity. So, the Sharī'ahs of the earlier prophets did not forbid such acts in an absolute manner, but prevented them from being used as the instruments of 'association' and infidelity. For example, making pictures of living things is not in itself an act of 'association' or infidelity, and was hence permissible in the earlier Sharī'ahs. In speaking of how the jinns used to serve Sulayman علیہ السلام (Solomon) the Holy Qur'ān itself says: يَعْمَلُوْنَ لَهٗ مَا يَشَآءُ مِنْ مَّحَارِيْبَ وَتَمَاثِيْلَ :"They made for him whatever he liked - places of worship, and pictures." (34:13) Similarly, prostrating oneself before somebody as a gesture of respect was permissible in the earlier Sharī'ahs. But gradually the practice opened the way to 'association' and infidelity on account of people's ignorance and thoughtlessness, and even caused grave distortions in the Sharī'ahs of different prophets, which had to be rectified by other prophets and other Sharī'ahs.

Since the Holy Prophet ﷺ is the last of all the prophets and messengers of Allah, and his *Sharī'ah* is the last of all Sharī'ahs and is

to remain valid upto the end of time, Allah has, in order to protect it against all distortion, stopped every chink through which 'association' or idolatry could possibly enter. That is why this *Sharī'ah* has strictly forbidden all those practices which had at one time or another served as a means towards 'association' or idol-worship.

For example, making pictures of living things has been totally banned; prostrating oneself before somebody, even as a mark of respect, has been forbidden; it is not permissible to offer one's *Salah* (prayer) at those hours of the day which the infidels had reserved for worshipping their gods, for even this slight and external correspondence might lead to 'association'; and, according to a *Ḥadīth* reported by Muslim, one is not allowed to call one's slave an "*'abd*", nor is a slave allowed to call his master a "*rabb*" - the words respectively signify "a slave" and 'one who gives nurture', and are as such harmless, but they can be misconstrued, and may mislead ignorant slaves or helpless and subjugated people into the worship of their masters: hence the prohibition.

With regard to the question of prostration, we may add that, according to some authentic scholars, *Salāh*, the basic form of Islamic worship, comprises of four kinds of actions - standing upright, bowing, sitting down, and prostrating oneself; the first two of these, standing up and sitting down, are actions which one habitually does in the course of one's daily chores, and which one also performs as acts of worship in the course of a *Salāh* (prayer), but the other two, bowing down and prostrating oneself, are actions which one does not go through as a matter of habit, and which are characteristically associated with *Salāh* (prayer) and *'Ibādah* (worship); hence it is that the Islamic *Sharī'ah* has identified them with acts of worship, and forbidden the Muslims to bow down or prostrate themselves before anyone other than Allah.

Given that the Holy Qur'ān itself speaks of prostration as a mark of respect, one would wish to know on what grounds it has been affirmed that the Islamic *Sharī'ah* has forbidden this practice. As to this question, we may point out that several well-known narrations coming down to us from the Holy Prophet ﷺ through quite a large number of his blessed Companions, are there to establish that

prostrating oneself before somebody as a mark of respect is unlawful (*harām*). To cite only one such narration, the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said that, if he could allow people to prostrate themselves before anyone other than Allah as a mark of respect, he would have commanded wives to prostrate themselves before their husbands. This clearly shows that prostration as a mark of respect is absolutely forbidden, and no allowance can, in this respect, be made in favour of any created being. We may add that the *Ḥadīth* we have just referred to has come down to us through twenty Companions, while, according to Tadrib al-Rawi, the famous book on the fundamentals of the science of *Ḥadīth*, a Tradition which has been reported by only ten Companions is called *Mutawātir*, and enjoys the same authority in the matter of injunctions as the Holy Qur'ān.

(2) The Holy Qur'ān describes Iblīs or Satan as an infidel. His infidelity does not arise from disobedience in his action, for, according to the *Sharī'ah*, giving up an obligation in practice is only a sin and a transgression, and does not constitute infidelity. Iblīs became an infidel, because he had defied and challenged a divine commandment, and had, in refusing to prostrate himself, virtually said that, in his opinion, Ādam عليه السلام was not worthy of it.

(3) Iblis had attained such a high degree in science and knowledge that he was called *Tā'ūs al-Malā'ikah* :"The Peacock Among the Angels." How did he, then, come to commit such a suicidal error? Some scholars say that it was because of his pride and vanity that Allah took back from him the wealth of knowledge and understanding, and hence he came to act like an ignorant fool. Others have suggested that his error was due to self-love and ambition. The famous commentary, 'Rūh al-Bayān' resolves the question by quoting a line of verse in Arabic which shows that once the aid of Allah has been withdrawn from a man, he can no longer save himself from sins, and all the effort he makes only serves to push him farther and farther into misguidance. May Allah, in his mercy, save all of us from such a fate! The commentary draws from it the conclusion that one should not be vain about one's learning or one's deeds or even about one's *'Īmān* (faith), for *Īmān* is valid only if it lasts till one's final breath and into the first stage of one's journey to the other world.

Verses 35-36

وَقُلْنَا يٰٓاٰدَمُ اسْكُنْ اَنْتَ وَ زَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هٰذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُوْنَا مِنَ الظّٰلِمِيْنَ ۝ فَاَزَلَّهُمَا الشَّيْطٰنُ عَنْهَا فَاَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيْهِ وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوْا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ فِى الْاَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَّ مَتَاعٌ اِلٰى حِيْنٍ ۝

And We said, "O Ādam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise, and eat at pleasure wherever you like, but do not go near this tree or you shall join the transgressors." Then, Satan caused them to slip from it, and brought them out of where they had been. And We said, "Go down, you all, some of you enemies of some; and on the earth there will be for you a dwelling place and enjoyment for a time." (Verses 35 - 36)

This is a continuation of the story of Ādam عليه السلام . When his superiority over the angels and his fitness for the role of viceregent had been announced to the angels and been acknowledged by them, and Iblis had been condemned as an infidel and expelled from Paradise on account of his pride and his defiance of divine authority, Ādam and Ḥawwā عليهما السلام (Eve), his wife, received a command from Allah to live in Paradise and enjoy its blessings. But they were also instructed not to eat the fruit of a particular tree. Now, having been disgraced because of Ādam عليه السلام , Iblīs or Satan had an account to settle with him, and as soon as he got the opportunity, he tricked them into eating from this tree. Because of this error on their part, they too were ordered to leave Paradise, and to go down and live on the earth. They were at the same time warned that their existence on the earth would no longer be full of perpetual bliss as it had been in Paradise, but that there would be dissension and enmity among men, their progeny, which would spoil the joy of earthly life.

Since these events took place after Ādam عليه السلام had been created and the angels had been commanded to prostrate themselves before him, some scholars have concluded from it that the creation of Ādam عليه السلام and the prostration of the angels took place somewhere outside Paradise, and that he was sent there later on. But the words of the Holy Qur'ān do not exclude the other interpretation that both the

events took place in Paradise, but that he had not been told at that time where he was to live, which was done later.

When Ādam and Ḥawwā عليهما السلام were sent to live in Paradise, they were allowed to eat whatever they liked 'at pleasure' - the Arabic word in the text being *'Raghadan'*, which signifies provision for which one does not have to work, and which is never exhausted nor falls short. Thus, their life was totally free from all care.

They were commanded not to go near a certain tree - which was an emphatic way of asking them not to eat its fruit. The tree has not been given a specific name either in the Holy Qur'ān or in the *Hadith*. Some commentators say that it was wheat, others say that it was a fig-tree or a grape-vine. But it is not really necessary to make specific what the Holy Qur'ān has left vague. (See Qurtubi) [15]

According to the Holy Qur'ān, it was Satan who 'caused them to slip' (*azallahumā*). It clearly shows that the error and disobedience of Ādam and Hawwā عليهما السلام was not of the kind which technically constitutes a sin, but arose out of a misunderstanding produced by Satan. They ate the forbidden fruit, because Satan had cleverly deceived them. [16]

A question arises here as to how Satan got into Paradise for seducing Ādam and Hawwā عليهما السلام , when he had already been expelled from there for refusing to prostrate himself. There are many possible ways in which he can have played his trick. Possibly he never

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15. Even the Bible does not name the tree. As to the apple being the fruit concerned, it is only a popular misunderstanding arising from the fact that the Latin word "*Malum*" means an "apple" as well as a "sin, or evil."

16. We may note that in the previous episode the Holy Qur'ān used the name Iblīs - a word which comes from the root Balas, 'to be disappointed', and hence signifies "one who has lost all hope of receiving the grace of Allah." In the present episode he has been called *Al-Shayṭān* - a word which comes from the root *Shatn*, "to be far away", and hence signifies "one who has been removed far away from the mercy of Allah." Iblīs is a proper name, while *Shayṭān* is the name of a genus. When the Holy Qur'ān speaks of *Al-Shayṭān*, it always refers to Iblis. But the common noun *Shaytan*, or its plural *Shayaṭīn* refers to the genus, which includes men and jinns both. It would be interesting to add that the root *Shayt* means 'the excess of anger and rage', and may possibly be the basis of the word *Shayṭān*.

met them, but planted the suggestion in their minds from afar - a thing which Satan can always do, and of which we have a specimen in the work of the hypnotists. It is equally possible that Satan, being one of the jinns whom Allah has given certain unusual powers denied to man, assumed the shape of a snake or of something else, and thus succeeded in entering Paradise. Perhaps it was because of this disguise that Ādam عليه السلام did not remember Allah's warning that Satan was his enemy. According to the Holy Qur'ān, Satan assured them on oath that he was one of their well-wishers (7:21). It apparently suggests that he did actually meet them, and speak to them face to face.

The Holy Qur'ān says that Satan فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا :"brought them out" of the state in which they had been living. In actual fact, they were 'brought out' under a divine command, but since Satan served as a means and as an intermediary, the action has been attributed to him.[17]

In commanding Ādam and Hawwā عليهما السلام to go down from Paradise, Allah also said, بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ: 'Some of you (shall be the) enemies of some.' If Satan had not been turned out of the skies till then, he is included in this address, the implication being that the enmity between Satan on the one hand, and Ādam and Hawwā' عليهما السلام and their progeny on the other, would continue on the earth too. But if Satan, as some scholars maintain, had already been expelled, then the addressees are Ādam and Hawwā' عليهما السلام and their progeny; the implication would now be that Ādām and Hawwā' عليهما السلام would have to undergo a double punishment, firstly that of being banished from Paradise, secondly that of seeing enmity arise among their children which must make life unpleasant for parents. (Bayān al-Qur'ān)

They were also told that the earth would be a temporary dwelling-place for them, and that they would have to leave it too, which also meant that they would not find real peace of mind there.

Ādam and Hawwa in Paradise

(1) In allowing Ādam and Hawwā عليهما السلام to eat at pleasure, and

17. The words of the Holy Qur'ān do not in the least imply that Satan had any power whatsoever to act on his own. So, any Manichean dualism is totally out of the question.

in forbidding them to go near the tree, Allah used, according to the text of the Holy Qur'ān, the verbs for the dual number, thus including both in the address. But in asking them to live in Paradise Allah did not address both of them, but said: أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ : "You and your wife." This form of address yields two legal principles: (a) the husband is responsible for providing a dwelling-place for his wife (b) for the purpose of dwelling the wife is dependent on the husband, and she must live in the house in which her husband lives.

(2) In this context the Arabic word *'uskun* (live) suggests that their stay in Paradise was to be temporary, not permanent which is a usual condition for the ownership of a house. Allah did not say that Paradise had been given to them, but only asked them to live there, for Allah knew that certain things were going to happen on account of which they would have to leave this dwelling-place. Moreover, the right to 'own' a dwelling-place in Paradise is earned through *'Īmān* (faith) and good deeds, which one can acquire only after the Day of Judgment. The *Fuqahā'* (jurists) have derived from it the principle that, if a man asks someone to live in his house, the other man does not thereby acquire the ownership of the house nor the right to a permanent stay. (Qurṭubī)

(3) In allowing Ādam and Hawwā علیهما السلام to eat at pleasure, Allah used the verb for the dual number, and said: "كُلَا" meaning 'eat both of you'. This indicates that in the matter of food the wife is not subservient to her husband, but can eat whatever she needs or likes, as can the husband.

(4) Allah also allowed them to eat from wherever they liked. This shows that man has the right to move freely from one place to another according to his needs or wishes.

(5) Allah did not want them to eat the fruits of a certain tree, but as a precautionary measure He commanded them not to approach it even. It is from here that the *Fuqahā'* have derived one of the basic principles of Islamic law, which requires that the things or actions which are likely to serve as means to sin or as its instruments are equally forbidden. That is to say, there are certain things which are

not forbidden in themselves, but when there is a danger that in making use of them a man would become involved in an unlawful activity, they too have to be forbidden.

The Prophets are innocent of all sins

(6) As we have seen here, Ādam عليه السلام had been forbidden to eat the fruit of a certain tree, and had also been warned against the machinations of his enemy, Satan, and yet he had eaten the forbidden fruit. It is seemingly a sin, while the Holy Qur'ān, the *Ḥadīth* and rational arguments too establish the innocence and sinlessness of all the prophets. There is an absolute consensus of the four great Imams of Islamic law and of all the authentic scholars on the doctrine that each and every prophet is innocent of and protected against all sins, major or minor. Some people have suggested that prophets are not protected against minor sins, but the majority of authentic scholars does not agree with this opinion. (Qurṭubī) It is necessary for prophets to be thus protected, because they are sent down to be the guides of men - if a guide can go against the commandments of Allah and commit a sin, major or even minor, people would no longer be ready to trust his word or deed. If one cannot have trust and faith even in the prophets, how can the work of spiritual guidance be possible? Hence the necessity of prophets being sinless.

The Holy Qur'ān does, however, relate certain incidents which tend to suggest that a certain prophet committed a sin, and drew upon himself the displeasure of Allah. The story about Ādam عليه السلام eating the forbidden fruit is one such instance. According to the consensus of the authentic scholars, in all cases a prophet comes to commit an error through a misunderstanding or just forgetfulness, and it is never a deliberate and wilful transgression of divine commandment. As is well-known, a *Mujtahid* is one who possesses the necessary qualifications for finding out through analogical deduction the rule for a case regarding which no specific commandment is present in the Holy Qur'ān or the *Ḥadīth*; if he makes a mistake in determining the rule, he still receives a reward from Allah for having made the effort. The mistake made by a prophet is always of this nature, or is due to oversight and hence pardonable, and cannot be called a 'sin' in the technical sense. Moreover, a prophet, being under the protection of Allah, can never

show oversight or forgetfulness in things which are directly concerned with his prophetic and legislative function, but only in personal matters. (See al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ)

The station of the prophets, however, is so exalted, that even a little oversight on the part of a great man is considered to be a great error. That is why such slips on the parts of certain prophets have been described in the Holy Qur'ān as 'sins', and Allah has shown his displeasure too, although they are not 'sins' in their nature.

As for the error committed by Ādam عليه السلام commentators have advanced several explanations:-

(a) A certain tree was pointed out to Ādam عليه السلام as being forbidden. But it was not this particular tree alone that was intended, but all the trees of this kind. The *Ḥadīth* too relates a similar case. Holding a piece of silk and some gold in his hand, the Holy Prophet ﷺ said that those two things were forbidden to the men in his *Ummah*. Obviously the ban does not apply to these very pieces of silk and gold alone, but to silk and gold as such. But it is quite possible for someone to imagine that only the particular pieces which the Holy Prophet ﷺ held in his hand were forbidden. Similarly, Ādam عليه السلام thought that the prohibition applied only to the particular tree which had been pointed out to him. Satan exploited this misunderstanding, and assured him on oath that, being a well-wisher, he could never advise him to do something which was wrong or harmful, and that the forbidden tree was quite different, and not the one from which he was asking him to pluck a fruit.

(b) Satan may have suggested to Ādam عليه السلام that the prohibition was valid only upto a period after he had been created, just as infants are denied heavy food till they have grown up, and that since Ādam عليه السلام had now grown stronger, the ban too had been lifted.

(c) It is equally possible that, when Satan told him that if he ate this fruit, the eternal bliss of Paradise would be guaranteed for him, Ādam عليه السلام forgot the prohibition. This verse of the Holy Qur'ān seems to give credence to such a possibility: فَنَسِيَ وَلَمْ نَجِدْ لَهُ عَزْمًا : "Ādam

forgot, and We did not find him steadfast." (20:115)

Anyhow, the essential point is that Ādam عليه السلام did not deliberately and wilfully disobey Allah; all that he did was an act of oversight or the kind of mistake which a *Mujtahid* can make. The error was not, properly speaking, a sin, but Ādam عليه السلام being so close to Allah, and in view of his station of a prophet, even this lapse was regarded as very serious, and described as a 'sin' in the Holy Qur'ān. But the Holy Qur'ān tells us that when he repented and prayed for pardon, Allah forgave him.

Verses 37-39

فَتَلَقَّىٰٓ اٰدَمُ مِنْ رَّبِّهٖ كَلِمٰتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ ۭ اِنَّهٗ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيْمُ ۝ قُلْنَا اهْبِطُوْا مِنْهَا جَمِيْعًا ۚ فَاِمَّا يَاْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِّنِّيْ هُدًى فَمَنْ تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُوْنَ ۝ وَالَّذِيْنَ كَفَرُوْا وَكَذَّبُوْا بِاٰيٰتِنَآ اُولٰۗىِٕكَ اَصْحٰبُ النَّارِ ۚ هُمْ فِيْهَا خٰلِدُوْنَ ۝

Then Adam learnt certain words (to pray with) from his Lord; so, Allah accepted his repentance. No doubt He is the Most-Relenting, the Very-Merciful. We said, "Go down from here, all of you. Then, should some guidance come to you from Me, those who follow My guidance shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve. As for those who disbelieve, and deny Our signs, they are the people of the Fire - they shall be there forever." (Verses 37-39)

Ādam's prayer to Allah

The earlier verses have related how Ādam عليه السلام came to commit an error through the seduction of Satan, and how he was commanded to leave Paradise and to go down to the earth. He had never experienced the displeasure of Allah before, nor heard such words of reproach. He could not bear it, and in the tumult of remorse at once wanted to beg humbly for pardon. But he was also afraid that by being importunate he might draw on himself more displeasure. Then, being a prophet, he knew Divine Majesty as ordinary men cannot. So, the fear and the awe dumbfounded him, and he could not utter a word. But Allah knows what passes through men's hearts, and He is also the

Most-Merciful and the Most-Generous. Seeing the agony of remorse in Ādam عليه السلام , Allah accepted his repentance, and his grace taught him the words of a prayer so that he could beg for pardon.

Thus pardon was granted to Ādam عليه السلام but Divine wisdom had all the same its own plans in sending him down to the earth - for example, starting through his progeny a new species, man, to be placed between the angels and the jinns; submitting men to the injunctions of the *Sharī'ah* by giving them the power of choice, however limited; instituting divine viceregency among them, and promulgating among them the prohibitions and the commandments of the *Shari'ah*, so that this new creature may be capable of making a spiritual progress and of attaining a station denied even to the angels. Allah had announced these purposes even before creating Ādam عليه السلام , when He said to the angels: إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً : "I am going to create a deputy on the earth." (2:30)

Descension of Adam was not a punishment

That is why the command for Ādam عليه السلام to go down to the earth was not withdrawn even when he had been pardoned: only the mode was now altered. Earlier the command had been given in the mode of authority, and the sending down to the earth intended as a punishment: hence the reference to the enmity among men. Now, it was in the mode of wisdom, and the sending down to the earth, an honour - the honour of viceregency. Hence the reference to things viceregency involves. In commanding Ādam and Hawwā عليهما السلام and their progeny to live on the earth, Allah told them that He would be sending down to men His guidance - that is, the injunctions of the Sharī'ah - through revelation, and that those who follow it faithfully shall be free from sorrow and anxiety - in other words, they shall not have to grieve about any loss in the past, nor to worry about some misfortune in the future.

In speaking of how Allah taught Ādam عليه السلام the words of a prayer so that he could offer his repentance properly, the Holy Qur'ān uses the word *Talaqqa*, which means 'accepting and welcoming a person or thing eagerly', and thus indicates his attitude in receiving the phrases. (See Kashshāf and Rūh al-Ma'ānī)

As to what these phrases were, different things have been reported from different Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, but the generally accepted report is that of the blessed Companion Ibn 'Abbās, رضی اللہ عنہ according to which these phrases are just the ones which the Holy Qur'ān cites in a different place: رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنفُسَنَا وَإِن لَّمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers." (7:23)

The Arabic word for repentance is *taūbah* which means 'a return'. So, *taūbah* is not merely an emotional attitude as the English word, 'repentance' seems to suggest. The word *taubah* is used with reference to Allah as much to men. When the word *taubah* is employed in case of a man, it signifies a necessary combination of three things:

(a) Acknowledging one's sin as a sin, being ashamed of it and feeling remorseful.

(b) Giving up the sin altogether.

(c) Making up one's mind firmly never to indulge in it again.

If any one of these three elements is missing, the *taubah* is not genuine. Thus, it is not enough for one's salvation merely to utter the words of repentance, unless the words are supported by remorse for the sins committed in the past, abstinence from them in the present and determination of not giving way to them in the future. So much for the use of the word *taubah* with reference to man.

In the present passage, the Holy Qur'ān uses the word with reference to Allah, and the phrase concerned literally signifies 'Allah returned to Adam'. It means that Allah again turned to him with His mercy and grace, and accepted his *taubah*.

Injunctions and related considerations :

(1) Asked as to what a man should do if he happens to have committed a sin, several great scholars and Sūfīs have been saying that he should do exactly what his first parents, Ādam and Hawwā علیہما السلام did - that is, he should be sincerely ashamed of his deed, make up his mind never to indulge in it again, and pray to Allah for His pardon as

they had: رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنفُسَنَا وَإِن لَّمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ:"Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers." (7:23) The prayer of Mūsā (Moses) عليه السلام was of the same nature: رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي فَاغْفِرْ لِي :"My Lord, I have wronged myself. Forgive me." (28:16) And when Yūnus (Jonah) عليه السلام made a mistake, he too prayed: لَّا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا أَنتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ "There is no God but You. Pure are you. I have certainly become one of the unjust." (21:87) (See Qurṭubī)

(2) As we have seen in the previous verses, the Holy Qur'an attributes the error of judgment to Ādam and Hawwā عليهما السلام both by using the verb *azallahuma* which indicates the dual number and thus means that Satan 'caused both of them to slip.' In recounting how Allah commanded them 'to go down' to the earth, the Holy Qur'ān again uses the verb for the plural number, thus including Hawwā عليها السلام in the command. On the contrary, in speaking of the *taubah* (repentance) of Ādam عليه السلام and the acceptance of his *taubah* by Allah, verse 37 mentions him alone, and, employing the verb for the singular, leaves out Hawwā عليها السلام . Even in other places, the Holy Qur'ān attributes the error to Ādam عليه السلام alone - for example, وَعَصَىٰ آدَمُ رَبَّهُ: 'Ādam disobeyed his Lord.' (20:121)

A possible explanation for the omission of Hawwā عليها السلام in such a context is that Allah wants woman to be kept hidden from prying eyes, and, in order to provide a cover for her, has not referred to her explicitly while speaking of sin and divine wrath. But when it comes to the question of *taubah*, the prayer which Allah taught to Ādam عليه السلام employs a verb in the plural number - "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves", and thus the Holy Qur'ān leaves no room for the supposition that the error of Hawwā عليها السلام was not pardoned, or that she did not offer repentance. Moreover, woman being inclusive to man in most situations, it was not necessary to mention her specifically every time the story was told. (Qurṭubī)

(3) The Arabic word *Taubah* signifies much more than the English word 'repentance'; similarly, the words *Tā'ib* and *Tawwab* mean much more than simply 'one who repents.' Imam Al-Qurṭubī says that the word *Tawwāb* is used with reference to Allah as well as to man.

For example, the Holy Qur'ān applies the word to man in the phrase: اِنَّ اللّٰهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِيْنَ : "Surely Allah loves those who repent" (2:222) - and in *al-tawwabin*, 'those who return to Allah'; on the other hand, it speaks of Allah too as *al-Tawwāb* : هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيْمُ :"He is the Most-Relenting, the Very-Merciful." (2:37) So, with reference to man, the word signifies 'one who turns away from disobedience and sin, and returns to obedience', while with reference to Allah it signifies 'one who accepts repentance, and turns to man with mercy and grace'. There is another word, *Tā'ib* which also means 'one who returns', but it is not permissible to use this word with reference to Allah. For, in the case of Allah, only those nouns, adjectives and epithets are permissible which have been used in the Holy Qur'ān and the *Ḥadīth* - all other words are disallowed, no matter what their lexical meanings are.

(4) Verse 37 shows that Allah alone has the authority to accept a man's repentance and to forgive his sins. By disregarding this principle, Jews and Christians fell into a great error, for they came to believe that if a priest or a saint forgave their sins, Allah too did the same. Even some ignorant Muslims behave as if they too entertain such a belief. But all such notions are doctrinally false. No religious scholar or saint, *'ālim* or *murshid*, has the authority to forgive sins; all he can do is to pray for the sinner, and seek Allah's pardon.

The obedient are freed of worries

(5) Verse 38 promises two great rewards to those who follow divine guidance - they will have no fear, and they will not grieve. Fear is the anxiety one feels in apprehending some trouble or pain in the future. Grief is the sorrow arising from the loss of something valuable or from one's failure in attaining a desired object. One can see that these two rewards comprehend all the possible forms of comfort and peace. Then, the text of the Holy Qur'ān makes a subtle distinction between the two. In saying that those who follow divine guidance will have no fear, it speaks in general terms and uses a noun - the Arabic phrase: لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ is to be translated literally as 'no fear upon them'. But in the next phrase وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُوْنَ, the Holy Qur'ān employs a verb, placing before it a pronoun as the subject. The literal translation of the

phrase is: 'they shall not grieve'. The implication here is that being totally free from all sense of loss is possible only to Men of Allah or the saints [18] who follow divine guidance in all its details; as for the others, no man whether an emperor or a billionaire, can help being grieved at the loss of a valued object or the frustration of a desire, all of which is but a necessary part of the scheme of things. The 'friends of Allah' do not have to grieve, because they annihilated their own desires and their very will in submitting themselves totally to the will of Allah. The Holy Qur'ān also tells us that those who go to Paradise will thank Allah for having removed from them all regret and sorrow: اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ الَّذِیْ اَذْهَبَ عَنَّا الْحَزَنَ : "All praise belongs to Allah who has put away all sorrow from us" (35:34). It means that some degree of sorrow is inevitable for every human being except those who have perfected and made fast their relationship with Allah.

Let us make it clear that the verse does negate all grief and sorrow in the case of the 'friends of Allah', but the negation applies only to the loss of worldly things and the frustration of worldly desires. As for the anxiety about the other world and the fear of Allah and the deep sense of awe before His Glory, the 'friends of Allah' are far ahead of other men in these. It has been reported that the Holy Prophet ﷺ often appeared to be worried and in deep thought - this was not for fear of any trouble or loss in the worldly sense, but on account of his anxiety for his *Ummah*, and of his awe before Divine Glory.

Nor does this verse imply that prophets and saints should not feel the instinctive and all too human fear when confronted by things which are generally known to inspire dread. The Holy Qur'ān itself relates how the prophet Mūsā (Moses) علیه السلام was struck with fear when his stick turned into a dragon: اَوْجَسَ فِیْ نَفْسِهٖ خِیْفَةً مُّوْسٰی : "Musa felt a fear in himself." (20:67)

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18. The word "Saints" is very weak and only an approximate translation of the Arabic phrase "Awliyā-Allah", 'the friends of Allah' - a concept which has only a faint resemblance with the Christian idea of a 'saint'. Consequently, the term 'men of Allah' has been used most frequently throughout this commentary.

But it was only an instinctive and physical fear, and the incident anyhow belongs to the early days of his prophethood, for when Allah said: لاتخف : 'Do not be afraid', the fear disappeared altogether. We may explain the incident in another way also. His fear did not arise as it does in the case of ordinary men, from the apprehension of some harm or hurt from the dragon, but from the likelihood that the extraordinary event might lead the Israelites into misguidance. So, this fear was not worldly, but other-worldly.

Verses 40-42

يٰبَنِيٓ اِسۡرَآئِيۡلَ اذۡكُرُوۡا نِعۡمَتِيَ الَّتِيۡٓ اَنۡعَمۡتُ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَاَوۡفُوۡا
بِعَهۡدِيۡٓ اُوۡفِ بِعَهۡدِكُمۡ ۚ وَاِيَّايَ فَارۡهَبُوۡنِ ۝ وَاٰمِنُوۡا بِمَآ اَنۡزَلۡتُ
مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا مَعَكُمۡ وَلَا تَكُوۡنُوۡٓا اَوَّلَ كَافِرٍۢ بِهٖ ۪ وَلَا تَشۡتَرُوۡا
بِاٰيٰتِيۡ ثَمَنًا قَلِيۡلًا ۖ وَّاِيَّايَ فَاتَّقُوۡنِ ۝ وَلَا تَلۡبِسُوا الۡحَقَّ بِالۡبَاطِلِ
وَتَكۡتُمُوا الۡحَقَّ وَاَنۡتُمۡ تَعۡلَمُوۡنَ ۝

O Children of Isra'īl (the Israelites), remember My blessing that I conferred upon you, and fulfil the covenant with Me, so I fulfil your covenant, and have awe of Me alone. And have faith in what I have revealed, confirming what is already with you, and do not be the first to deny it, nor take a paltry price for My signs. And fear Me alone. And do not confound truth with falsehood, and do not hide the truth when you know. (Verses 40 - 42)

The Sūrah Al-Baqarah begins by speaking of the Holy Qur'ān itself, and tells us that although it provides guidance to all men, yet only true Muslims will derive a full benefit from it. The Sūrah proceeds to warn the disbelievers against the grievous punishment which awaits them in the other world, and also to delineate the misdeeds of the two kinds of disbelievers - those who deny openly, and the hypocrites. Then, addressing all the three groups, it urges upon them to worship Allah alone, and, presenting the Holy Qur'ān as a miracle which cannot be imitated by man, invites them to have faith in it. Next, the Surah recounts how Ādam عليه السلام was created to be

the viceregent of Allah, and thus shows the omnipotence and wisdom of Allah so that men may realize why they must obey and worship Him and never be disobedient to Him.

Now, in the days of the Holy Prophet ﷺ there were two kinds of people among the disbelievers and the hypocrites. On the one hand were *mushrikin*, idolaters and associators who did not possess any religious knowledge, were even otherwise mostly illiterate, and followed the customs of their forefathers - for example, the inhabitants of Makkah in general whom the Holy Qur'an calls the *Ummiyyūn* (the illiterate). On the other hand were those who believed in the earlier prophets, had a knowledge of the earlier Divine Books like the Torah and the Evangile, and were known as being well-educated. Some of them were the followers of Sayyidnā Mūsā عليه السلام (Moses), but did not accept Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام (Jesus) as a prophet - these were the *Yahūd* or the Jews. Others were the followers of Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام , but did not believe that Sayyidna Mūsā عليه السلام was, being a prophet, divinely protected against all sin - these were the *Nasārā* or the Christians. On account of their belief either in the Torah or the Evangile or in both, the Holy Qur'ān calls these two groups *Ahl al-Kitāb* (the people of the Book). Being well-educated, they were respected and trusted by the people around them, and their opinion had a great deal of weight. If they came to the straight path, others too could be expected to follow their example.

The Jews predominated in Madīnah and its environs. The Sūrah Al-Baqarah is also Madinite. So, after dealing with the idolaters and associators, it addresses the people of the Book in a special manner, from verse 40 to verse 123. Adopting a persuasive and friendly tone, the Surah refers to the noble family to which they belong and the honour which they receive from the people on account of such an affiliation; then, recounting the blessings which Allah has been showering on them, it asks them to be aware of their many misdeeds and their sins, and invites them to come to the Straight Path. All this has been said, to begin with, in a very brief manner - four verses inviting them to Islam, and three to good deeds. Then comes a long and detailed address to them, at the beginning of which, as also just before the end, occur the words, *yā Banī Isra'īl* (O children of Israel) -

the repetition is, of course, the usual rhetorical device for making the speech persuasive.

Isra'il is a Hebrew word, signifying 'the servant of Allah'; it is also the second name of Sayyidnā Ya'qūb (Jacob) عليه السلام . Certain scholars have remarked that among the prophets it is the Holy Prophet ﷺ alone who has several names, except for Sayyidnā Ya'qūb عليه السلام who has two names, Ya'qūb and Isra'īl. The Holy Qur'ān addresses the Jews here, not as the "Children of Ya'qūb", but as the "Children of Isra'īl", so that the title may remind them that they are the children of the 'the servant of Allah', and hence they should follow the example of their father in worshipping Allah alone and in obeying Him.

In verse 40, Allah asks the Israelites to fulfil His covenant - that is to say, the one they had made with Allah. According to Qatadah and Mujāhid, the following verse of the Holy Qur'ān refers to this covenant which had been mentioned in Torah as well (For the Covenant, see Exodus, ch. XXXIV) (165):

وَلَقَدْ أَخَذَ اللّٰهُ مِيثَاقَ بَنِيٓ إِسْرَآئِيلَ وَبَعَثْنَا مِنْهُمُ اثْنَيْ عَشَرَ نَقِيبًا ۖ وَقَالَ اللّٰهُ
إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ ۖ لَئِنْ أَقَمْتُمُ الصَّلٰوةَ وَآتَيْتُمُ الزَّكٰوةَ وَآمَنْتُمْ بِرُسُلِي وَعَزَّرْتُمُوهُمْ
وَأَقْرَضْتُمُ اللّٰهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا لَأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّكُمْ جَنّٰتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ
تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهٰرُ ج

Allah made a covenant with the children of Isra'il, and We raised up from among them twelve chieftains. And Allah said, 'I am with you. Surely, if you perform the prayer, and pay the alms, and believe in My messengers and help them, and lend to Allah a good loan, I will forgive your evil deeds, and I will admit you to gardens underneath which rivers flow' (5:12).

The covenant mentions acts like prayers and alms, but the most important clause is having faith in all the messengers of Allah including the Holy Prophet ﷺ . Hence, according to the blessed Companion Ibn 'Abbās, the covenant here signifies having faith in and obeying the Holy Prophet ﷺ (See Ibn Jarīr).

As for Allah fulfilling their covenant, the verse we have just quoted (5:12) makes the meaning clear - Allah will forgive the sins of those who fulfil the terms of the covenant, and will admit them to Paradise. Verse 41 makes it quite explicit that according to the covenant it is

obligatory for the Israelites to have faith in the Holy Qur'ān, for, after all, it has been sent down to confirm the essential teachings of the Torah. Now, the Israelite scholars were afraid that if they told the truth in this matter, they would be going against the public sentiment, and thus lose their adherents and income both. So, these three verses exhort them to speak the truth without fear, for Allah alone is worthy of being feared.[19]

Injunctions and related considerations

(1) Al-Qurṭubī remarks in his Commentary that Allah, in asking the Israelites to worship and obey Him, reminds them of the bounties and blessings He has showered on them, but in the case of the followers of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم He asks them to do so without mentioning His bounties: فَاذْكُرُونِيٓ أَذْكُرْكُمْ : "Remember Me, I will remember you." (2:152)

This is a subtle suggestion which brings out the superiority of this *Ummah* over the others - the Islamic *Ummah* has a direct relationship with Allah, for it begins by recognizing the Benefactor, and through this knowledge recognizes His bounties; other peoples, on the contrary, begin by recognizing the bounties, and proceed through this medium to a knowledge of the Benefactor.

(2) Verse 40 shows that it is obligatory to fulfil the agreement one has entered into, and it is forbidden to break one's promise. The injunction has been stated explicitly in another verse: أَوْفُوا بِالْعُقُودِ : "Fulfil your agreements." (5:1)

According to a *ḥadīth* reported by Muslim, those who break their promises would, before being finally punished in the other world, be humiliated before the whole human race when it assembles together on the Day of Judgment, for a flag would be placed as a stigma beside everyone who has committed this sin, and the bigger the crime, the higher would the flag be.

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19. Let us add that what the Holy Qur'ān confirms with regard to the Torah and the Evangile is the fact that they are the Books of Allah. As for the distortions which have from time to time been introduced into them, they are no part of the original texts, and hence the question of confirming such interpolated passages does not arise.

(3) Verse 41 asks the Israelites not to be the first to deny the Holy Qur'ān, although being a disbeliever is in itself the ultimate sin, whether one be the first or the last. The verse, in fact, suggests that the man who is the first to deny and disbelieve will not only incur the sin of his own denial but also bear the additional burden of the sin of misleading all those who follow his example; and will thus have to undergo a multiple punishment.

It follows from here that the man who is in any way responsible for others falling into any kind of sin will have to bear the burden of this sin along with the sinners; similarly, the man who in some way helps others to do a good deed will receive a reward for it along with them. Several verses of the Holy Qur'ān and the *aḥadīth* of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم repeatedly stress this point.

(4) Verse 41 warns the Israelites against taking a paltry price for His signs or verses (the Arabic word, *Āyāt* has both the meanings). The context makes it clear that it is forbidden to take money from people by misinterpreting or concealing the verses of the Book of Allah in order to please them or to serve their worldly interests. There is an absolute consensus of the *Ummah* on this point.

(5) As for the question of taking a wage for teaching the verses of the Holy Qur'ān or for reporting them correctly, verse 41 is not concerned with the matter. But it is an important question in itself whether it is permissible to accept wages for teaching the Holy Qur'ān. There is a divergence of views among the *Fuqahā'* (jurists) in this matter. Imām Mālik, Imām al-Shāfi'ī and Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, consider such wages to be permissible, while the great Imām Abū Ḥanīfah and some other jurists hold them to be impermissible, for the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has forbidden the use of the Holy Qur'ān as a means of livelihood. But there has been a radical change in the circumstances since then. Formerly, those who taught the Holy Qur'ān used to receive a subsistence allowance from the *Baytul-Māl*, or the public exchequer of the Islamic state. But since Islamic society fell into a disorder, [20] they lost their financial support. The teaching of the Holy Qur'ān to children being a full-time job, the teachers could

20. Through the onslaught of Western imperialism and other factors.

not turn to difficult professions without interrupting this essential chain of transmitting the Word of Allah from generation to generation. In view of this situation, the jurists of the Hanafi school declared it permissible to accept wages for teaching the Holy Qur'ān. According to *Hidayah*, the famous book of *Hanafī* code, this should be the rule (*fatwā*) these days. Later jurists have extended the permission to similar duties like leading *Salāh* (*Imāmah*), calling for prayers (*Adhān*), teaching the *Ḥadīth* and the *Fiqh*, etc., for they are related to the teaching of the Holy Qur'ān, and the survival of Islām equally depends on them. (See al-Durr al-Mukhtār, al-Shāmī)

(6) The famous Ḥanafī scholar Shāmī has, in his commentary on "al-Durr al- Mukhtār" and in his own book "*Shifāl-'Alīl*", explained in great detail and with convincing arguments that the later jurists have allowed the acceptance of wages for the teaching of the Holy Qur'ān etc. only in view of an essential religious need which must be fulfilled, or the whole Islamic order would be disturbed; hence the permission should be limited only to such essential needs. It logically follows from this principle that paying or receiving wages for the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān for transmitting the reward to the dead or in the interest of some worldly purpose is forbidden, for it fulfils no essential religious need. Thus, the man who recites the Holy Qur'ān for wages in this manner and the man who pays him for it both commit a sin. When there is no merit earned in such a recitation, how can it be transferred to the dead? Al-Shāmī refers to many authoritative works like "*Tāj al-Sharī'ah*", 'Aynī's commentary on *Hidāyah*, the marginal notes by *Khayr al-Dīn Al-Ramalī* on "*al-Bahr al-Rā'iq*", etc., and specially cites *Al-Ramalī* to the effect that practices like paying for the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān beside the grave of a dead man or elsewhere in order to transmit the reward to him, have never been reported from the blessed Companions or their immediate successors or from other great scholars of the early centuries of Islām, and are hence an innovation (*Bid'ah*) in religion.

(7) Verse 42 explicitly shows that it is not permissible to mix truth and falsehood together in such a way that the addressee falls into a confusion as to what the truth is, and that it is forbidden to conceal the truth because of fear or greed.

Imām al-Qurṭubī has, in his commentary, related a very illuminating story in this context - a story which has come down to us through a chain of reliable reporters, and has been taken from the "Musnad" of Darimi.

During one of his visits to the Holy town of Madīnah, the Ummayyid Caliph Sulaymān ibn 'Abd al-Mālik wanted to meet someone who had lived with a Companion of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, if such a man was still alive. On being informed that Abū Ḥāzim was the only man of this kind left in the town, he sent for him .

The Caliph said to him, "Abū Ḥāzim, why have you shown such discourtesy and disloyalty?"

"How have I been discourteous or disloyal to you?"

"Everybody who is anybody in Madīnah has come to see me, but you haven't", complained the Caliph.

"O chief of the Muslims, may Allah protect you against saying something which is not true to the fact", replied Abū Ḥāzim "You have not been familiar with my name before today, nor have I ever seen you. Things being what they are, how could I come to meet you? Is it disloyalty or discourtesy?"

The Caliph looked around questioningly. Imām Zuhrī spoke up: "Abū Ḥāzim is right, and you are wrong."

Changing the subject, the Caliph asked: "Abū Ḥāzim, how is it that I don't like to die?"

"The reason is simple," Abū Ḥāzim said "You have made your world flourish, and turned your habitation in the other world into a desert. Naturally, you don't like to leave a flourishing city for a desert."

The Caliph admitted that it was true, and came out with another question: "What would it be like when we have to appear before Allah tomorrow?"

Said Abū Ḥāzim, "The man who has been doing good deeds will present himself before Allah like the man who returns from a travel to his loved ones, while the man who has been doing evil deeds will

appear like the slave who had run away and has now been brought back to his master."

The Caliph burst into tears, and said with a sigh, "I wish we could know how Allah would deal with us."

Abū Hāzim replied, "Assess your deeds in the light of the Book of Allah, and you will know."

"Which verse of the Holy Qur'ān can help us to do so?"

"Here is the verse: إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ وَإِنَّ الْفُجَّارَ لَفِي جَحِيمٍ : "Surely the righteous shall be in bliss, and the transgressors shall be in a fiery furnace." (82:13-14)

The Caliph remarked: "Allah's mercy is great; it can cover even the wrong-doers."

Abū Hāzim recited another verse: إِنَّ رَحْمَتَ اللهِ قَرِيبٌ مِّنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ : "Surely the Mercy of Allah is close to those who do good deeds." (7:56)

The Caliph advanced another question: "Tell me, Abu Hazim, who is the most honorable among the servants of Allah?"

"Those who are mindful of their fellow-human beings, and possess the right kind of understanding to know the truth."

"Which is best among good deeds?"

"Fulfilling the obligations laid down by Allah, and keeping away from what He has forbidden."

"Which is the prayer that is likely to be accepted by Allah?"

"The prayer of a man for him who has done him some good."

"Which is the best form of charity?"

"Giving as much as one can, in spite of one's own need, to a man in misery without trying to make him feel grateful and without causing him pain by trying to put him off."

"Which is the best form of speech?"

"Speaking the truth plainly and unreservedly before the man who can harm you in some way or from whom you expect a favour."

"What kind of man is the wisest among the Muslims?"

"He whose actions are governed by obedience to Allah, and who invites others as well to it."

"What kind of man is the most stupid?"

"He who helps another man in committing some injustice, which comes to mean that he has been selling off his faith for serving the worldly interests of that man."

The Caliph agreed with all this, and then asked him pointedly, "What do you think of me?" Abū Hāzim wanted to be excused from replying to such a question, but the Caliph insisted that he should say a word of advice. Abū Hāzim said:

"O chief of the Muslims, your forefathers established their rule over the people with the help of the sword and against their will, after killing hundreds of men. Having done all this, they departed from the world. I wish you could know what they themselves are saying after their death and what people are saying about them."

Fearing that the Caliph would be displeased by such plain talk, one of his courtiers rebuked Abū Hāzim for having spoken so rudely. He replied: "No, you are wrong. I have not said anything rude but only what Allah has commanded us to say. For Allah has enjoined upon the *'ulamā'* to speak the truth before the people and not to conceal it." And he recited this verse of the Holy Qur'ān: لَتُبَيِّنُنَّهُۥ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَكْتُمُونَهُۥ : "You shall make it clear to the people and not conceal it." (3:187)

The Caliph asked, "Alright how can we reform ourselves now?"

Abū Hāzim said, "Give up your pride, acquire a spirit of fellow-feeling for the people, and give them justly what is due to them."

"Abū Hāzim, is it possible that you come to live with us?"

"May Allah protect me from it!"

"Why?"

"Because I am afraid that if I live with you, I might begin to like your wealth and your grandeur, and have to suffer a grievous punishment for it in the other world."

"Well, is there anything you need? What can we do for you?"

"Yes, I have a need. Please help me to save myself from Hell and to enter Paradise."

"This is not in my power."

"Then, there is nothing you can do for me."

The Caliph asked him to pray for him. Abū Hāzim made this prayer: "O Allah, if you approve of Sulayman, make the well-being of this world and the next easily accessible to him; but if he is your enemy, drag him by the hair towards the deeds you approve of."

The Caliph then asked him for some special advice. Abū Hāzim said: "I shall make it short. You should have the fear of your Lord and reverence for Him to the degree that He never finds you present at the place He has forbidden, and never finds you absent from the place where He has commanded you to be."

Later on, the Caliph sent one hundred gold dinars to him as a present. Abū Hāzim sent the money back with a letter, saying: "If these dinars are the wages for my words, then blood and pork are, in my eyes, cleaner than this money. If you believe that this money is my due from the public exchequer, then there are hundreds of *'Ulamā'* and servants of Islam. If you have sent the same amount to each one of them, I can accept the money, otherwise I do not need it."

Abū Hāzim's refusal to accept the wages for giving advice clearly shows that taking wages for an act of worship or obedience to Allah is not permissible.

Verses 43-46

وَاَقِيْمُوا الصَّلٰوةَ وَاٰتُوا الزَّكٰوةَ وَارْكَعُوْا مَعَ الرّٰكِعِيْنَ ۝
اَتَاْمُرُوْنَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ اَنْفُسَكُمْ وَاَنْتُمْ تَتْلُوْنَ الْكِتٰبَ ؕ
اَفَلَا تَعْقِلُوْنَ ۝ وَاسْتَعِيْنُوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلٰوةِ ؕ وَاِنَّهَا لَكَبِيْرَةٌ
اِلَّا عَلَى الْخٰشِعِيْنَ ۝ الَّذِيْنَ يَظُنُّوْنَ اَنَّهُمْ مُّلٰقُوْا رَبِّهِمْ وَاَنَّهُمْ
اِلَيْهِ رٰجِعُوْنَ ۝

And be steadfast in *Salāh*, and pay *Zakāh*, and bow down with those who bow. Do you bid others to righteousness while you ignore your ownselves,

although you keep reciting the Book? Have you then no sense? And seek help through patience and prayer. And it is indeed exacting, but not for the humble in heart who bear in mind that they are to meet their Lord, and that to Him they are to return. (Verses 43 - 46)

In the last three verses and these four, Allah reminds the Israelites of the blessings He has bestowed upon them, and invites them to Islam and to good deeds. The earlier three verses were concerned with the true faith and doctrines; the present verses speak of good deeds, mentioning only the most important of them. It was usually the love of money and power that made it difficult for the Jews, specially for their scholars, to accept Islam. The verses prescribe the remedy for the twin diseases - they should fortify themselves with *Ṣabr* (patience) and *Salāh* (prayer).

"Patience" is a very weak translation of the Arabic word *Ṣabr*, which has three connotations: (a) bearing pain and misfortune patiently (b) restraining oneself from sin (c) being steadfast in obeying Allah.

Now, patience, in this wide sense, is the perfect remedy for the love of money. For, money cannot be an end in itself, but is sought only as a means of satisfying one's appetites; when a man has made a firm resolve not to follow his appetites like a slave, he will no longer need much money, nor will the love of money blind him to the distinction between his gain and loss. Similarly, *Salāh* is the remedy for ambition and the love of power. For, outwardly and inwardly both, *Salāh* involves the exercise of humility; naturally, the more one tries to perform it in the proper manner, the more it purifies him of the love of money and power, and of ambition and pride. These being the real substance of all spiritual disorder in man, once they are brought under control, it becomes easy for one to accept Islam and to be steadfast in one's faith.

Let us add that while patience (*Ṣabr*) requires only the restraining or giving up of excessive appetites and unnecessary desires, *Salāh*, in addition to all this, further requires the performance of certain actions, and also a temporary renunciation of perfectly lawful desires

and of many human needs which the Sharī'ah allows one to fulfil, e.g., eating, drinking, speaking, walking etc. - and, at that, making such a renunciation five times during the day and the night regularly at fixed hours. Thus, *Salāh* means performing certain prescribed actions and restraining oneself from all lawful or unlawful activities at fixed hours.

Once a man has decided to give up unnecessary desires, the instinctive urge itself loses its intensity in a few days. So, the exercise of patience is not, after all, so difficult. But offering *Salāh* entails submitting oneself to the conditions laid down by the Sharī'ah, observing the fixed hours, and giving up the basic human activities and desires, all of which is quite exacting for the instinctive disposition of man. So, one may very well raise an objection here: for the purpose of making it easy for a man to accept Islam and to be steadfast in his faith, the Holy Qur'ān prescribes *Ṣabr* and *Salāh*, but to use this remedy is in itself a difficult thing, specially the *Salāh* and its restriction - now, how can this difficulty be overcome? The Holy Qur'ān admits that performing *Salāh* regularly and steadfastly is, no doubt, exacting, and proceeds to show the way out of this impasse - *Salāh* is not a burden to the humble in heart.

To know the effectiveness of the remedy, we must know the disease, and find out why *Salāh* should be so burdensome. The human heart loves to roam about freely in the vast spaces of thought and fancy; all the organs of the human body being subservient to the heart, it requires them to be equally free. On the other hand, *Salāh* demands the renunciation of such freedom, - and prohibits eating, drinking, walking, talking etc. - a restriction which annoys the heart and is also painful for the human organs governed by it.

In short, *Salāh* is burdensome because the heart enjoys to keep the faculties of thought and imagination in a continuous motion. Motion being the disease, it can only be remedied by its opposite - restfulness. Hence, the Holy Qur'ān prescribes *Khushū'* (خشوع) a word which we have rendered into English by the phrase "humbleness in heart", but which actually signifies "the restfulness of the heart."

Now, the question arises as to how one can acquire this

"restfulness of the heart." Everyone knows through his own experience that, if one deliberately tries to empty one's heart of all kinds of thoughts and fancies, the effort rarely succeeds. The only way to achieve it is that since the human mind cannot move in two directions simultaneously, one should make it absorb itself in one thought alone so that all other thoughts may disappear by themselves without any effort on one's part. So, having prescribed "the restfulness of the heart", the Holy Qur'ān also prescribes a particular thought which will, if one absorbs oneself in it, drive away all other thoughts: once the movement of thought and fancy has been reduced to the restfulness of the heart, the performance of *Salāh* becomes easy; regularity in offering the ordained prayers gradually cures the disease of pride and ambition, and thus the way to the perfecting of one's faith grows smooth. Such is the well-ordered and beautifully integrated art of spiritual medicine that the Holy Qur'ān has given us! [21]

Now, the thought in which one should immerse oneself in order to acquire "the restfulness of the heart" has been explained by the Holy Qur'ān in describing "the humble in heart" - they are the people who bear in mind that they are to meet their Lord, when they shall receive the reward for their obedience, and also bear in mind that they are to return to Him, when they shall be required to present an account of their deeds. These twin thoughts produce hope and fear in the heart, and hope and fear are the best agents for inducing a man to devote himself to good deeds.

The prayer which the Holy Qur'ān prescribes is not a mere contemplation or meditation. *Al-Salāh*: الصلوٰة , in the terminology of Shari'ah, is a definite form of *'Ibadah* or worship, the mode of which is divinely ordained. As often as the Holy Qur'ān insists on the performance of the *Salāh*, it employs the word *Iqāmah*, except in one or two instances. Lexically, the word means "making a thing straight,

21. As against this stand the fanciful systems of thought - concentration, wearing a pseudo-mystical look and some-times an Eastern make-up but all spawned in the Angst-ridden West - things like Yoga and Transcendental Meditation, which serve only to derange an already disordered psyche.

or keeping it firmly in its place." A tree or a wall or anything which is vertical and straight, usually lasts long in its place; so, the word also signifies "establishing a thing or making it perpetual." Thus, the conjunction of the two words, *Salāh* and *Iqāmah*, in the Holy Qur'ān and the *Ḥadīth* signifies, not merely offering the prayer, but performing the five ordained prayers steadfastly in the prescribed form at the prescribed hours and fulfilling all the necessary conditions. The Holy Qur'ān and the *Ḥadīth* speak of the great rewards and blessings one can hope to receive for offering *Salāh*, and of other benefits which flow from it, but all of them are tied up with *Iqāmah* in the sense which we have just explained. For example, the Holy Qur'ān says: إِنَّ الصَّلٰوةَ تَنْهٰى عَنِ الْفَحْشَآءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ : "The *Salāh* restrains one from indecency and evil." (29:45) The prescribed prayer will bear these fruits only when one has been performing it in the full sense of *Iqāmah*. It follows from it that if one finds people who are quite regular in offering their prayers indulging in immodest or even evil activities, one should not have misgivings about the veracity of this verse, for these people have, no doubt, been praying, but not been observing the conditions of *Iqāmah*.

Verse 43 also speaks of paying *Zakāh*, the prescribed alms. Now, lexically speaking, the Arabic word زكوة : *Zakāh* has two significations: (a) to purify (b) grow. *Zakāh* is not a tax levied by the State or society, but, in the terminology of the Sharī'ah, means that portion of one's belongings which is set apart and spent in total accord with the injunctions of the *Sharī'ah*.

This verse is addressed to the Israelites, and does not by itself show that offering prayers and paying alms was obligatory for them before the days of Islam. But the following verse:

وَلَقَدْ اَخَذَ اللّٰهُ مِيْثَاقَ بَنِيْٓ اِسْرَآءِيْلَ وَبَعَثْنَا مِنْهُمُ اثْنَىْ عَشَرَ نَقِيْبًا ۚ وَقَالَ اللّٰهُ اِنِّيْ مَعَكُمْ لَئِنْ اَقَمْتُمُ الصَّلٰوةَ وَاٰتَيْتُمُ الزَّكٰوةَ

Allah made a covenant with the Israelites and raised among them twelve chieftains. And Allah said, 'I am with you. Surely, if you perform *Salāh* and pay *Zakāh*'. (5:12)

does show that the two things were obligatory for them, even if the external modes might have been different.

The verse proceeds to say: "Bow down with those who bow (in worship)." Lexically, the Arabic word *Rukū'* means "to bow down", and may hence be applied even to prostrating oneself (*Sajdah*), which is the ultimate form of bowing down. But in the terminology of the Shari'ah it pertains to the particular form of bowing down which has been prescribed for *Salāh*.

One may well ask why this particular gesture has been chosen for a special mention from among the different gestures involved in the *Salāh*. We would reply that it is a metonymy for *Salāh*, and a part has been made to stand for the whole - just as in verse 17:78 : قُرْاٰنَ الْفَجْرِ : "the recitation of the Qur'ān in the morning" refers to the morning prayers, and on several occasions in some *Hadith* narrations the use of the word *Sajdah* covers one set of movements (*Rak'āh*) in *Salāh* or even to the whole of it. Thus, the verse actually means: "Offer *Salāh* along with those who offer *Salāh*."

***Salāh* with *Jamā'ah* : (congregation)**

Then, there is a more comprehensive explanation for the specific reference to "bowing down" (*Rukū'*). The form of the ritual prayers ordained for the Israelites and others included prostrating oneself (*Sajdah*), but not bowing down. This particular way of bowing down called *Rukū'* is peculiar to the Islamic *Salāh* alone. Hence, *Rakī'in* or those who bow down (in worship) are, obviously enough, the members of the Islamic *Ummah*, and the verse, in effect, asks the Israelites to accept Islam, and to offer their prayers along with the Muslims.

The command, اَقِيْمُوا الصَّلٰوةَ : "Be steadfast in *Salāh*", shows that *Salāh* is obligatory. The other command, وَارْكَعُوْا مَعَ الرّٰكِعِيْنَ : "Bow down with those who bow (in worship)", establishes that *Salah* is to be offered in the company of other Muslims (*Jamā'ah*).

A very important question arises here - what is the degree of the obligation intended in this injunction? There is a difference of views among the *Fuqahā'* (jurists) on this point. According to a large body of blessed Companions, their successors and of the jurists of the *ummah*, it is necessary (*wājib*) to offer *Salāh* in a congregation, and it is a sin to give up the *Jamā'ah*. Some of the blessed Companions have gone to the length of holding that it is not permissible to offer *Salāh* all by

oneself without a proper excuse allowed by the Sharī'ah. Verse 43, in its literal connotation, provides an argument in favour of this view. Moreover, certain *ḥadīth* narrations too seem to suggest that the *Jamā'ah* is necessary(*Wājib*). For example, a *ḥadīth* reported by Abu Dawud says that for a man living near a mosque *Salah* is permissible only in the mosque.

According to another *hadith* reported from the blessed Companion Abū Hurayrah رضى الله عنه by Imām Muslim, a Companion who was blind asked the Holy Prophet ﷺ for the permission to offer *Salāh* in his house, for there was no one to take him to the mosque and to bring him back. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم allowed him to do so, but, as he was leaving, asked him if he could hear the call for the prayers in his house. He said that he could. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم remarked: "In that case, you must come to the mosque." Another narration of the same *ḥadīth* as reported by Abū Dāwūd adds that the Holy Prophet ﷺ said: "Then, I see no room for making a concession in your case." Similarly, al-Qurṭubī cites a *ḥadīth* from the blessed Companion Ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه who reports that the Holy Prophet ﷺ once said: من سمع النداء فلم يجب فلا صلوة له إلا من عذر : "The man who hears the call for the prayers but does not go to the mosque for the *Jamā'ah*, has not offered his prayers at all, except that he should have some valid excuse." On the basis of such *aḥadīth*, Companions like 'Abdullāh ibn Mās'ūd and Abū Musa al-Ash'arī رضى الله عنهم have ruled that if a man lives close enough to a mosque to hear the call for prayers and yet does not attend the *Jamā'ah* without a valid excuse, his offering of the *Salāh* at home is not acceptable. (Let us explain that hearing the call refers to the call made by a man possessing an average voice, and not to that made by a man with an extraordinarily loud voice or broadcast by a loudspeaker). Presented this far were arguments advanced by our revered elders who consider that *Salāh* with *Jamā'ah* is *wājib* or necessary.

On the other hand, the majority of the blessed Companions, their successors and later jurists hold that the *Jamā'ah* is a *Sunnah* which has been particularly emphasized (*Mu'akkadah*), and that among the *Sunnah* of this kind it is, like the *Sunnah* offered in *Fajr Salāh*, the most emphasized so as to come very close to being necessary. On the

basis of certain other verses and *Ḥadīth* narrations, they interpret the imperative in "bow down with those who bow" as intended for emphasis only. As for the *aḥadīth* which appear to be saying that it is just not permissible for those who live near a mosque to offer their *Salāh* at home, they say that these only mean that this is not the perfect way to offer the prayers.

The most comprehensive explanation of the matter has been provided by the blessed Companion 'Abdullāh ibn Mās'ūd, as reported by Imām Muslim: "The man who wishes to meet Allah tomorrow (i.e. the Day of Judgment) as a true Muslim, should offer these (five) prayers regularly and steadfastly in a place where the call for the prayers is habitually made (i.e. a mosque), for Allah has laid down for your Prophet certain ways of good guidance (*Sunnan al-Hudā*), and offering the five prescribed prayers with the *Jamā'ah* is one of them. If you offer these prayers at home," he added pointing towards a man, "as he does, keeping away from the *Jamā'ah*, you will have forsaken the *Sunnah* of your Prophet, and if you forsake the *Sunnah* of your Prophet, you will go astray. The man who (performs the *wudū'* or ablution and cleanses himself in the proper manner, and then) goes to a mosque, for every step that he takes, Allah forgives one of his sins, adds one good deed to his account and promotes him one rank higher. Our company was such that there was not a single man, except for people known for their hypocrisy who would offer their prayers at home away from the *Jamā'ah*, so much so that even when a man was ill or unable to walk, he was brought to the mosque with his hands resting on the shoulders of two men, and made to stand in the row of those who were praying."

This statement fully brings out the great importance of the *Jama'āh*, but at the same time defines its exact position by including it among the "ways of good guidance" (*Sunan al-Hudā*) which are, in the terminology of the *Fuqahā'* (jurists), called *Al-Sunan al-Mu'akkadah* (the *Sunnah* on which the greatest emphasis has been placed). Thus, if a man does not go to the mosque for *Jamā'ah* and offers *Salāh* at home without having proper excuse like illness, his prayers will be valid, but he will have earned the displeasure of Allah for having given up a *Sunnah* which comes under the category of *Mu'akkadah*. If neglecting

the *Jamā'ah* becomes habitual for him, he will be committing a grave sin. If all the people living in the vicinity of a mosque leave it deserted and offer their prayers at home, they become, in the eyes of the *Sharī'ah*, liable to punishment. Qādi 'Iyad says that if persuasion fails to mend such people, they must be challenged by a show of force. (Qurṭubī)

An admonition to preachers without practice

Verse 44 addresses the religious scholars of the Jews, and reprimands them for a strange contradiction in their behaviour - they used to advise their friends and relatives to follow the Holy Prophet ﷺ and to be steadfast in their Islamic faith, which shows that they regarded Islam as the true faith, but, being enslaved to their desires, were not prepared to accept this faith themselves, although they were regular readers of the Torah and knew how emphatically it denounces the scholar who does not act upon his knowledge. Though externally addressed to the Jewish scholars, the verse, in a larger sense, condemns all those who preach good deeds to others but do not act upon this principle, who ask others to have fear of Allah but show no such fear in their own behaviour. The *Ḥadīth* speaks in detail of the dreadful punishments these men will have to bear in the other world. The blessed Companion Anas reports that on the Night of the Ascension (معراج), the Holy Prophet ﷺ passed by some people whose lips and tongues were being cut with scissors made of fire; on being questioned as to who they were, the Archangel Jibrā'il عليه السلام (Gabriel) explained that they were certain avaricious preachers of the Holy Prophet's عليهم السلام *Ummah* who bade others to good deeds but ignored themselves. (Ibn Kaṯīr). According to a *ḥadīth* reported by Ibn 'Asākir, certain people living in Paradise will find some of their acquaintances in the fire of hell, and ask them, "How is it that you find yourselves in hell, while we have attained Paradise just on account of the good deeds we had learnt from you"; those in hell will reply: "We used to say all that with our tongues, but never acted upon what we said." (Ibn Kaṯīr)

All this should not be taken to mean that it is not permissible for a man who has himself been slack in good deeds, or is in some way a transgressor, to give good counsel or preach to others, nor that a man who has been indulging in a certain sin may not try to dissuade others

from committing that sin. For, doing a good deed is one form of virtue, and persuading others to do this good deed is another form of virtue in its own right. Obviously, if one has given up one form of virtue it does not necessarily follow that he should give up the other form as-well. For example, if a man does not offer his prescribed *Salāh*, it is not necessary for him to give up fasting too. Similarly, if a man does not offer his prayers, it does not argue that he should not be allowed to ask others to offer their prayers. In the same way, doing something prohibited by the Sharī'ah is one kind of sin, and not to dissuade those whom he can influence from this misdeed is another kind, and committing one kind of sin does not necessarily entail committing the other sin as well. (Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī)

Imam Malik has cited Sa'īd ibn Jubayr as saying that if everyone decides to refrain from persuading others to good deeds and dissuading them from evil deeds on the assumption that he himself is a sinner and can have no right to preach to others until and unless he has purged himself of all sins, there would be no one left to give good counsel to people, for who can be totally free of sins? According to Ḥasan of Basra, this is exactly what Satan wants that, obsessed by this false notion of purity, people should neglect their obligation to provide religious instruction and good counsel to others. (Qurṭubī)

Maulana Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī used to say that when he became aware of a certain bad habit in himself, he would expressly denounce this particular tendency in his sermons so that the *barakah* of the sermon should help him to get rid of it.

In short, verse 44 does not imply that the man who has been indifferent to good deeds in his own life is not allowed to preach or to give good counsel, but that the man who preaches should not neglect good deeds in his own life. Now, a new question arises here - it is not permissible for a preacher and non-preacher alike to neglect good deeds, then why should the preacher alone be specifically discussed in this context? We would reply that such negligence is, no doubt, impermissible for both, but the crime of the preacher is more serious and reprehensible than that of the non-preacher, for the former commits a crime knowing that it is crime, and cannot plead ignorance as an excuse. On the contrary, the non-preacher, specially if he is illiterate , may be

committing the sin of not trying to acquire knowledge, but, as far as the transgression of the Sharī'ah is concerned, he can, to a certain degree plead ignorance of the law as his excuse. Moreover, if a scholar or a preacher commits a sin, he is actually mocking at the Sharī'ah. The blessed Companion Anas رضی اللہ عنہ reports from the Holy Prophet ﷺ that on the Day of Judgment, Allah will forgive illiterate and ignorant people much more readily than He will the scholars.

***Khushū'* : The Humbleness of Heart**

Verse 45 speaks of the humble in heart. The "humbleness of heart" (*Khushū'*), which the Holy Qur'ān and the *Hadith* speak of, connotes a restfulness of heart and humility arising out of the awareness of Allah's majesty and of one's own insignificance in comparison to it. This quality, once acquired, shows its spiritual fruitfulness in making the obedience to Allah and submission to Him easy and pleasant for one; sometimes it reflects itself even in the bodily posture and appearance of the man who has acquired it, for such a man always behaves in a disciplined and polite manner, is modest and humble, and seems to be "broken-hearted", that is to say, one who has lost all vanity and self-love. If a man does not bear genuine humility and fear of Allah in his heart, he does not, with all his external modesty and downcast looks, really possess the quality of *Khushū'* (humbleness of heart). In fact, it is not proper even to show the signs of *Khushū'* in one's behavior deliberately. On seeing a young man sitting with his head bowed down, the rightly-guided *Khalīfah* Sayyidnā 'Umar رضی اللہ عنہ said: "Raise your head! Humbleness of heart is in the heart." Ibrāhīm Nakha'ī has said: "Humbleness of heart does not mean wearing rough clothes, eating coarse food and keeping the head bowed down. Humbleness of heart is to treat the high and the low alike in matters of truth, and to keep the heart free to devote itself entirely to Allah and to the performance of what Allah has made obligatory for you." Similarly, Ḥasan of Basra has said : "The Caliph 'Umar would speak loudly enough to be heard, whenever he spoke, would walk swiftly, whenever he walked, and would strike forcefully, whenever he struck a man. All the same, he undoubtedly was a man with a real humbleness of heart." In short, wearing deliberately and by one's own choice, the looks of a man who possesses the humbleness of heart is a

kind of self-delusion and a ruse of Satan, and hence reprehensible. But if a man happens to manifest such signs without knowing it, he can be excused. (Qurtubi)

Let us add that there is another word - *Khudū'* - which is often used along with *Khushū'*, and which appears several times in the Holy Qur'ān as well. The two words are almost synonymous. But the word *Khushū'*, according to its lexical root, refers to the lowering of the voice and of the glance when it is not artificial but arises out of a real modesty and fear of Allah - for example, the Holy Qur'ān says: "Voices have been hushed" (20:108). On the other hand, the word "*Khudū'*" refers to the bodily posture which shows modesty and humility - for example, the Holy Qur'ān says: "So their necks will stay humbled to it." (26:4) We must also define as to what, in the eyes of the Sharī'ah, the exact position and value of *Khushū'* is with regard to *Salāh*. The Holy Qur'ān and the *Ḥadīth* repeatedly stress its importance as in: "And perform the prayer for the sake of My remembrance." (20:14)

Obviously, forgetfulness is the opposite of remembrance, and hence the man who becomes unmindful of Allah while offering *Salah*, is not fulfilling the obligation of remembering Allah. Another verse says: "Do not be among the unmindful." (7:205)

Similarly, the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said: "The *Salāh* simply means self-abasement and humility." Says another *ḥadīth*: "If his prayers do not restrain a man from immodesty and evil, he goes farther and farther away from Allah." *Salāh* offered unmindfully does not obviously restrain man from evil deeds, and consequently such a man goes farther and farther away from Allah.

Having quoted these verses and *ahadith* in support of other arguments in his *Iḥyā' al-'Ulūm*, Imām al-Ghaẓālī suggests that *Khushū'* must then be a necessary condition for *Salāh*, and that its acceptability must depend on it. He adds that, according to the blessed Companion, Mu'ādh ibn Jabal and jurists as great as Sufyān al-Thawri and Ḥasan al-Basrī, *Salāh* offered without *Khushū'* is not valid.

On the other hand, the four great Imāms of Islamic jurisprudence and most of the jurists do not hold *Khushū'* to be a necessary condition